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A Long Time Ago.

BY META ORRED.

BOOK I.—MARJORIE.

CHAPTER I.

MARJORIE.

"GOOD-DAY, Reuben."

"Good-day, Miss Marjorie."

The two speakers, a man and a girl, stood one on either side of a little wicket-gate opening onto a flagged pathway leading through a small plot of orchard ground to a gray, granite-built cottage. The girl was young, about twenty. She was tall and slight, though with firmly-knit limbs, and an air of wild freedom in every movement. Her hair was caught back from her face, and rolled tightly in a shining mass, that glistened and shone like the gorse in the bright moorland sun, with here a curl and there a tendril like the spiral of the wild briony around the broad white brow. Her eyes were large, dark, and full of thought and earnest feeling; and though her mouth and chin were slightly too massive and square, they could not materially mar the nobility of expression. It was a sweet, womanly, loving face, and a grand head.

And so thought Reuben Yool, as he stood with one hand grasping the gate—a slight barrier between them. Reuben must have been at least twenty years older than Marjorie Fleming. He was tall and strongly built, with great square shoulders, large hands and feet, and a grave still face, with an intensity of will and concentration of force, combined with latent power, which was very remarkable. Reuben Yool, independent and wealthy yeoman farmer, was in love with Marjorie Fleming, the ex-coastguard's daughter. A keen observer could have at once judged from her address to him how hopeless as yet was his suit. She called him "Reuben," he called her "Miss Marjorie"—therein lay difference supreme. To her he was Reuben Yool, the great moorland farmer, who lived in the remains of an ancient priory, five miles from them; a strange, silent, lonely, kindly man; their landlord; a friend who had latterly come over day by day to their lonely cottage, to inquire after the rapid-

ly declining health of her father; and—nothing more. He was standing now with his rough cap in his hand, his loose riding-coat flapping against his legs, and his bridle slung over one arm, loosely enough to allow the powerful horse he had been riding to crop a few blades of grass. He was looking at her wistfully and in silence. He had ridden over to reassure them about their rent; which was due rather awkwardly as regarded Mr. Fleming's pension and the quarter-day; they were backward, and had sent a message requesting a week or two's grace. And now he had said briefly that their time was his time.

"It is very good of you," said Marjorie, after a slight pause. "It has been very expensive fitting out Edward Fleming."

"He is coming here, is he not?"

"Yes, we expect him very soon, indeed to-night—he sails on the 20th. I can't bear to think of his going for so long—he is just like my brother. I have known him all my life."

A gray look passed over Reuben's face, but she did not notice it, for she did not love the man.

"You will catch cold out here," he said next.

She laughed. "Oh, no, I have lived here too long for that; this is such delicious air."

He made some inquiries for her father and then departed; while she stood shading her eyes with her fingers and watching him ride slowly over the high swelling ridge to the left. Then she went in.

"Reuben has been here, father; he is so good," she said, bending over an emaciated figure cowering before a bright fire.

"What did he say, my Meg?"

"That the rent does not in the least signify. Father, is not Edward very late?"

"No. Come here, child, and let me look at you, my bonnie, bonnie bird," he went on murmuringly, as she crept closer to him and kissed his thin white hands. "My darling, my darling, if only"—he stopped abruptly. And she could not induce him to continue.

Mr. Fleming was dying of decline, and the thoughts of Marjorie, his only child being left utterly alone in the world at his death weighed on his mind, and seemed to paralyze his efforts to rouse himself. He had been obliged to resign his appointment in the South, where at least the climate had been in his favor, and had returned to the North, the former home of his dead wife, to find himself dying. The only relation he knew of was his orphan nephew, a



MARJORIE FLEMING.

lieutenant in the navy. There had been feud between his father and Mr. Fleming, and his now dying uncle was bent on obliterating as much as possible all remains of the quarrel by doing what he could for his nephew. It had not been much that was in his power, but as soon as Edward lost both father and mother his uncle had written to tell him that whenever he chose, and had opportunity, he would find a home-welcome with himself and Marjorie. And the boy went gladly at such times as he could. As yet he had never been north, but he would arrive this evening for a short week, before sailing for the West Indies.

Marjorie had lively recollections of her boy-cousin five years before; and the whole day she was flitting up and down the house incessantly; out of her room and into his with this, that, and the other—tiny treasures to decorate his little abode. On the mantel-shelf she put the two lovely pink shells and the stuffed parrot he had brought her in former visits; then, retiring backward to glance at the effect, she struck against the little couch. Ah! out she ran and fetched in a Spanish leather, richly embroidered cushion, also one of his gifts. She poked the fire, gave a settling touch to the gorse and holly in the white mug on the table, put two feather screens behind the shells, and then, lilting a merry sea-song, ran down the little narrow, wooden stairs to await his arrival.

Katie in the kitchen was making hot coffee, and singing to herself too. Good, strong, honest, cheerful Katie. A foundling brought home by Mr. Fleming, and always kindly treated and trusted, she repaid the kind-hearted sailor to the utmost, by taking watchful care of Marjorie, by working early and late, and never flagging in cheerfulness and good-temper.

Marjorie found her father dozing. She brought a great buffalo-robe, a relic of better days, and wrapped him tenderly in it; and then, seized by an uncontrollable fit of restlessness, she wandered around the room, settling things. She gave a twist to most of the furniture, altered the butter-dish, settled the coffee-pot, peeped into the cream-jug, and altogether disported herself in a very impatient way, with frequent and nervous starts and bendings of the head to listen—yet with all this movement she was so gentle and trod so lightly that the sleeper never stirred. Presently the little gate clanged, and a hasty step came running up the pathway. The color flew over Marjorie's face, she shook all over, stood for one second motionless, and then flying to her father she clung to him, saying:

"Awake! awake!"

As Mr. Fleming opened his eyes drowsily and murmured "What?" the door flew open.

Katie was seen very red and smiling, and there stood Edward Fleming; a tall, slight, fair young man, with tightly curling hair, and merry, dancing eyes. He made a dash at Marjorie, and then stopped suddenly on seeing how tall and womanly she had grown. Coloring scarlet, he seized both his uncle's hands, and nearly squeezed them off.

"Ned! Ned!" said the sick man, with startling energy, "how fresh and well you look! how strong, how like"—

And then he faltered and his breath stopped, while Ned, shocked at the great change in his uncle since they had last met, stammered and stuttered, and finally said nothing.

Meanwhile Marjorie suddenly found her head going round, her heart was beating like a sledge-hammer; her face was hot and her hands were cold; that Edward was grown into a man, and that—well, she did not quite know what more.

"Won't you shake hands?" said a deep, shy voice; and then her fingers nearly lost all feeling in that warm grasp, and her eyes fell before that honest, admiring glance.

For a short time everybody was very shy and uncomfortable after that coming together, so unlike what each had imagined it might be, and they all and severally tried so hard to find meeting-points that they signally and lamentably failed, which occasioned the

most alarming pauses; when two of them, or all three would plunge wildly to the rescue, and generally contrive to come out with exactly the same thought in different words. However, by degrees, matters came straight. Mr. Fleming was drinking coffee and holding Ned by one hand, and Marjorie and Edward were talking very fast indeed, and looking at each other as though they had never met before, and were very strange creatures. When the meal was over, Edward having eaten nothing to speak of, having felt his hunger vanish in a mysterious manner, and Marjorie having eaten nothing at all, but persistently spoiled her bread by crumbling it up and putting it down again, they all three drew around the little fire and talked; at least the two young ones did, and so fast and both together that when they had finished they hardly knew what they had said, so began again *ad libitum*. Mr. Fleming, who had stayed up later than usual, kept nodding, till at last he said:

"Marjorie, darling, I must go to bed."

Then, taking Edward's arm and Marjorie's hand, they all three went up stairs. At his door he bade them good-night and blessed them very solemnly, went in and closed it; and those two others were left without, on the last step, silent.

Now a strange thing happened: they neither spoke, but suddenly Marjorie took it into her head that Edward wanted her to go down again and have a chat, as they used to do in old days, surreptitiously. For as children, when everyone supposed them to be safe in bed, they would steal down at night, rake out the embers, still glowing and warm, and tell each other the most awful, horrible, and utterly improbable stories, till it became imperative on them to hold each other tightly and breathe hard to prevent screaming out loud, and so bring down on them the united and righteous indignation of Mr. Fleming and Katie, and thus put a stop forever to this highly entertaining proceeding. With Marjorie, to think Edward wished a thing was to do it instantly; so down she sped and he after her. The instant they were safely inside the parlor, he said:

"Marjorie!"

In all her life, past, present, and to come, Marjorie never had thought, or again thought, her name sounded like that Marjorie—so utterly beautiful, indeed, did it sound to her that she trembled all over, and the great tears came throbbing in her eyes.

Now no more shall be written regarding anything that was said in the Marjorie-tone, because those things cannot be written of; and indeed little was said, actually. Imagine then those two sitting before the fire, on the floor; the girl's head on the man's shoulder, and their three hands tightly locked. I say three hands, as Edward was obliged to place one arm around Marjorie's waist, to keep her from falling into the fire, or tumbling backward against the sofa, the position they were in being slightly insecure. The wild moor wind moaned up against the window, the shadows danced up and down on the walls, and the firelight glowed on their two faces, suffused with that heavenly thrill that comes but once in every life, and not always that.

They first talked a great deal of nonsense, then they were silent, and then they talked of a thousand and one things: of Mr. Fleming's health or Marjorie's lonely life, of Edward's prospects, of this coming voyage, which was somehow to make his fortune, only no one knew how exactly, and then of Reuben Yool, of his kindness and friendliness; and Marjorie expatiated on his goodness about the rent, and told Edward how she respected him and liked him, till Edward opined he was indeed a good fellow, and he would ride over and thank him (and pay the rent, only he did not say that). And then they came back to Edward himself and his long voyage, and what he would bring back for Marjorie, and how she was to go on loving him more and more, and not forget him, and—etc., till the clock struck twelve.

At last they went up to bed, leaving the fire

out and the room cold, and a long, gray, trailing shadow lying across the rug where they had been sitting, which looked like a heavy, wet shroud, and was only the reflection of the narrow mirror. As he closed the door he saw it, and shuddered with all a sailor's superstition; but she smiled in his face, and then said anxiously:

"Are you cold?" laying a gentle hand on his arm, and thus sending a thrill through his every vein that would have slain any cold, however lurking.

Marjorie went into her little chamber with a firmer and more thoughtful tread than she had ever planted there before, and did not hear him go down stairs again, peep into the parlor, look at the shadow and go up to it, in order to convince himself as to what caused it. Then come up again more slowly, pause at her door and hearken, and finally go into his own room.

No, she heard nothing of all this. With her beautiful hair all down, she was kneeling by her little bed, thanking God over and over for the love of this strong, true-hearted sailor; and the swelling tears had their own way now, though indeed she still kept pressing them back with her long, white fingers; tears of delicious feeling and gratitude. "Marjorie—Marjorie"—her sweet name came back, and yet back again to her, like some faint whisper of future joy and unutterable happiness. That he, who had been her idol, her darling from childhood, should love her and wish her to be his wife was no surprise to her, but an enthralling joy. How she would love him, how true she would be to him; he had asked her if she would wait. Aye, that she would, forever, on into eternity: never weary, through sickness and health and separation—and death in life, silence; she would wait, wait, wait here in her lonely—lonely, with thoughts of him!—lonely northern home. She would live and think, dream and pray, of and for him. Her whole being was flooded with happiness.

Marjorie, standing by her window gazing out over the moorland, because in her intense feeling it seemed to her her outward vision as well as her inner wanted expansion. Marjorie, in her trembling happiness, with that thrilling light on her noble head and transfigured face, was beautiful exceedingly.

CHAPTER II.

EDWARD.

MR. FLEMING was not astonished at the news which greeted him in the morning. He perhaps kissed Marjorie more tenderly than usual, and wrung Edward's hand a little harder, while watching those two beaming faces with a yearning love painful in its intensity; for it marked how far he had traveled toward that bourn from whence is no returning.

The birds in the orchard thought the morning very delightful no doubt, for it was bright and sunny in the gnarled and twisted apple-trees; and the hoar-frost on the moss and lichen melted quickly enough not to freeze their little feet as they hopped about after the crumbs which Marjorie tossed to them with generous abundance. But, ah! to her the glory of the day shone in her lover's face, now turned on her, now on her father. And the sunlight, reflecting the passionate tints of the gorse, lay warm and nestling in her heart, full of its adoring love.

Mr. Fleming, knowing well how strong and true and tender her lover was, rejoiced to think of the husband his child would have; and taking heart of grace from his trust, he braced and girded himself anew to live till this voyage was past, and then, he thought, lying back in his arm-chair and watching those two bright young heads bent close together—then, "home to my wife, thank God, and our child will be safely sheltered by that dear, noble Ned." And all that day, like the distant roll of an organ, came these words: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."

Edward took an early opportunity—not of

riding, for the gray cob on which he had counted had died two years before—of walking over to Yool farm. He started at a swinging trot, but paused on the ridge to the left to look back and wave his cap to Marjorie; he caught up a bit of gorse and blew it toward her, sending a shower of golden spray in the air; and then with a merry shout dipped down in the hollow and raced on his way. There was no distinct track, but Marjorie had so accurately described to him how to proceed that it seemed easy enough. "What awful desolation!" he said to himself, pausing to get breath, after a wild scamper of about a mile over ups and downs of moorland, with tufts of gorse and bracken and heather, and weird-looking gray boulders lying in all directions. Marjorie's home lay in a hollow near the outer edge of the moor, but Yool Farm was nearly five miles farther in. How monks ever came to build in so dreary and lonely a place I cannot undertake to say. An ancestor of Reuben's had obtained possession of the partially destroyed priory during the troubles preceding the Commonwealth. It might have been cheerful enough, who knows? with plenty of monks for company; or in the time of the Roundhead Yool, who had plenty of money and energy, and kept great numbers of domestics and hinds; but now it was dreary and lonely enough, for though the energy was hereditary, the money bags were not.

The farm consisted principally of sheep: sheep you saw everywhere—sheep on the moors; sheep in the pens; sheep in the very garden, though they did not stay there long when the "Dame" caught sight of them. Lambs lay (it seemed the whole year round) before the kitchen fire. Sheep-skins, cleaned and dyed, decked the house in the shape of door-mats and chair and bed covers—in fact, sheep abounded inside and out. There were several men on the farm; chief among them was Robin, a sort of Eidolon to Reuben—of whom more anon; but only one woman had lived there for years and years, "Dame" being the name by which she was known—of whom, also, more anon. Just surrounding the house stood a few stunted and twisted fir-trees—so twisted, so stunted, that they looked like spirits doomed to eternal agony. The wind was forever piping to them, and they danced weird dances in the autumn and winter evenings. Sometimes in summer they donned golden flake armor, and rang and sang sharp, harp-like ditties, with their contorted branches clashing together like wooden cymbals; they were the only trees on the moor, and Yool Farm was proud of possessing them.

Oh! the desolation of desolation of the country around the farm, as it stretched away for miles up and down—gray, green; green, gray—with no living thing on it but sheep, wild and shaggy; with its great cairns of gray granite—the tiny rills that went flowing between the lichens and mosses just deep enough to submerge the feet of the wagtails, and enable them to take a bath in the long summer days; with the great iron-bound-looking clouds piling up in the north all through the winter nights; with its dreary, restless wind, that howled and tore, and raged and moaned, and sobbed and wailed over its wastes—a horror of desolation lay always brooding on the moor; except, perhaps, in the height of summer-time, when the gorse and thyme and harebells were out, and the lichens and mosses lay jeweled by the rill, and the larks were trilling their hearts away to the azure heavens; and the great fat double-dores droned away blunderingly over the thistles; when cloud-shadows lay on the rocks, and golden gleams of warm sunlight came with flying warm feet, and touched with dainty haste the short turf and coltsfoot. Ah! then one might wander, and never feel weary, all alone; with the wind, soft and alluring, pressing against one's face, and the lark's song ringing a sweet refrain; one forgot, then, the horror of desolation—at least, if one had never been out on that moor in the dead of winter.

Reuben Yool loved the wildness of it dearly; he had been born and bred there; and though he had gone south for some schooling, he had only been away a year or two, and had come

back with a greater love for it than ever—with that sort of clinging, heart-deep feeling generally only known to mountaineers.

Reuben had a powerful, drastic intelligence, and seized and held knowledge firmly. If he had lived in these days, or if, even then, he had lived with minds more akin, he might have become a great man. But in those days there were few books of the kind he valued, and even those there were were difficult to obtain; so he fought on in the dark, and strove with his eager mind as he best might—feeling his powers cramped and straitened, and meeting with no sympathy—till he grew to shrink from speech of any kind that would betray even involuntarily his bent of thought, and bring down ridicule on his far-reaching, anxious ideas.

To look at him, he was a big, burly farmer; and yet his sensitiveness—proceeding from the very quickness of his intellect—was intense to pain. His only present companion, the "Dame," was not one to converse with; so that after a long and hard day's work Reuben would sit silent, and brood over many things which vexed his brain with vague, because unanswerable, questionings, till his spirit grew stern in its very power—and sad, unutterably.

Five years before this story opens the Flemings had come to the cottage; and then and there Reuben fell in love with Marjorie. He loved her with a blind, idolizing devotion that engrossed his whole being and submerged his whole soul. Forgotten were all his old struggles and lonely vigils. His one idea was Marjorie Fleming; her voice was in the wind to him; her eyes in every flower he loved most dearly; her footfall forever at his door. He was possessed by a sweet, strange spirit, as truly as any being ever was or could be so, and his possession was Marjorie. He could not remember his mother, but could he not swear that she must have been even such a one as Marjorie? with the same sweet eyes and noble face, the same ready hand and open, loving heart? He was always on the moors, if only to catch a distant peep at her. She lent him books from her father's tiny store. She could converse with him (mark you, converse) on many of his favorite subjects. He found, indeed, that she knew many things that he did not, for Marjorie had been well and curiously taught by her father; not in mere finger and voice accomplishments only, but in sound, logical knowledge.

Reuben studied and read with redoubled ardor and vigor, and was in a state of beatitude, till one day she named Edward Fleming. And then, oh! blow most bitter, the light that came burning in her eyes, the color that came flooding in her cheek, betrayed her at once to the man who loved her so dearly. In fact, Reuben knew before she did that she loved her cousin. The knowledge, cruel as it was, came just in time to save his being rejected; he had meant to have spoken that very night, but, alas! Fate willed it otherwise.

Reuben went home that night with a sick despair, for what had he to look forward to in his lonely life? Worse than lonely now, for he had actually grasped the very skirts of happiness, and now it had vanished utterly. He had thought summer was come for him, after his lonely days of suffering and coldness of heart: and behold it was only an early and treacherous spring, which in those northern climes is often more bitter than winter.

Reuben was sitting in the low, long, vaulted chamber known as the Refectory when Robin put his head in and said, "Wanted." He looked up from his books and saw hastily entering a slight, handsome young sailor. No need to tell him who. He rose in silence, for he never wasted words, a trick Robin had long since caught.

"Reuben Yool?" said Edward, interrogatively; then added frankly, "I came to see you, because I have heard so much of you from my cousin Marjorie Fleming, and I want to know all those whom she knows and likes,

and who have been good to her. I am Edward Fleming."

For his life Reuben could not say "You are welcome," though he wished to do so.

"Will you sit down?" he managed to say gravely, and Edward perched himself sideways on one of the long, narrow tables that ran down each side of the hall, and went on:

"Marjorie says you have been beyond measure good to her and her father." Then with a slight hesitation, "She is mine now, and I want to thank you; will you shake hands, and let us be friends?"

And the sailor held out both his brown, honest hands to the yeoman standing before him, and looked up at him with his frank blue eyes.

"Aye, I will," and they shook hands.

"Marjorie sets great store by you," said Edward, laughing cheerily. "You are the noblest and most generous fellow. What an advantage you have had over me all these years; why I have never once seen her."

"More fool he that did," said a harsh croaking voice at the door that made the sailor start.

The strangest little creature stood there, uttering that weird sound. A little old witch of a woman: with a tight black dress on, a large white cap, black mittens, and a long apron. And such a cadaverous face, with two cruel-looking projecting teeth.

"Fool! fool! fool!" she reiterated passionately, pointing at Reuben, but advancing no farther than the threshold.

"Dame, I am busy," said the farmer sternly, and with a jarring, mocking laugh she vanished.

"Gramercy! you have a queer companion," said Edward, considerably astonished.

"Aye, she is my grandmother," said Reuben, curtly; and the subject being evidently painful, Edward forbore to make any further remark on the beldam.

"You came surely with a purpose?" began Reuben after a slight pause.

"Yes—firstly to see and thank you, and then to pay the rent."

"Which I refuse, you not being my tenant," answered Reuben, as though the words were blows.

"But, as Marjorie's future husband," began the sailor.

"I distinctly refuse to accept the money—let us say no more on the subject."

Edward looked at the gloomy face and strong, knotted hands of the yeoman, and seeing no mere words would move him, wisely dropped the point at issue. And as Reuben did not offer to take him over the farm or continue the conversation, there was nothing further to be done or said, and so bidding him good-bye, and inwardly marveling at Marjorie's admiration for any one so apparently silent and surly, the sailor departed.

Going around to the front of the house, I know not why—but some sudden, unaccountable fancy seized him to go and peer in at a splendid old bay-window. He leaped a flower-bed or two and did so. There sat the "Dame," curled up by the fire spinning, and with every whir of the wheel moving her jaws backward and forward mysteriously.

"Eugh! you old witch!" said Ned, and made a grimace at her.

Exactly as he did so she turned around and saw him. Up she sprang like a cat, climbed on to the high window-seat, and cried out at him in a shrill, weird tone:

"Curse you!—curse you!—curse you!"

Seeing, as it were, those long curling claws and teeth coming at him, for the latter seemed to spring out in front like a serpent's fangs, Ned beat a hasty retreat among the flower-beds, and remained ignominiously at bay there.

The sight of her trampled plants appeared to enrage the old crone tenfold; she danced with rage on the window-seat, and finally skittered about the room, yelling with passion; while Ned roared with laughter, and went on dancing too, in imitation of her antics, like a very jolly sailor as he was.

At last he was fairly out of breath, and grew

really penitent on seeing the state of exhaustion the old woman was in; so he drew up to the window, made a trumpet of his hands, and cried:

"I beg your pardon, old lady; I'll bring you back a parrot from my next voyage to make up."

The old woman scowled with deadly hate, and then as suddenly smiled on him. She beckoned him closer to the window, and putting her mouth to a cracked pane, she said, with a low and terrible hiss:

"Take my blessing and forgiveness: *You will never come back!*"

Ned shook his fist at her good-humoredly, and ran off laughing, and singing the same old sea-song Marjorie had lilted the evening of his return.

CHAPTER III.

EDWARD AND MARJORIE.

How bright and beautiful those days were. The memory of them afterward was like the faint vesper glow that lingers in the summer heavens with a holy calm light long after the sun is gone. What mattered to those two that the mists lay chill and heavy on the moors; that the wind and rain drove fitfully against the windows in the long, dark evenings. The light of love was strong and bright enough to quench all such gloomy things. Marjorie watching her lover—so strong, so tender—leading her father by little "steps" down the flagged path, and out by degrees to the ridge, on fine mornings; day by day enticing Mr. Fleming to go a little farther by the aid of that eager arm, and yet so carefully pausing if he thought his uncle needed to take breath. Or else over the fire in the parlor, cheering him with praises of her, or telling him long and laughable yarns about his sailor life. Marjorie could but clasp her hands tightly together, and thank God inwardly for giving her one so noble and so dear. She wondered sometimes why Reuben never came over now, but it was only vaguely; as we miss anything that has formed part of the daily routine of our life without much heed on our part till it passes. Edward was restless enough to keep her in a constant state of alertness, and full of prank and cheerfulness. He would tease Katie's old cat, and cause the nearest approach to anger of which that good maid was capable by dressing up the tabby, and turning it mewing piteously into the garden among the hens and chickens, where it would stumble about in its long kitchen apron, much to its own confusion and Marjorie's mirth.

The best time was in the evenings, Marjorie thought, when her father dozed, and she and Edward sat on the sofa and talked in low voices—they were often very silent too, for Edward thought of leaving Marjorie, and she thought of his loss with ever increasing vividness and terror. So silent was she one evening—the last but two—that Edward, who had been watching her for some time, said at last:

"Marjorie, why are you so quiet?"

She nestled closer to him and said, "I am always quiet when I am quite happy."

"That is a strange way of feeling happy," he answered, "with those great tears in your eyes; and" (possessing himself of her two hands "I believe, you strange little thing, you will like it better when I am gone, for then you can think of me.")

"Edward!"

"Well."

"The only thing I dread is this voyage; I don't know why I am so fearful this time."

"But I do."

"Why?"

"Because you never loved me so much before, and did not know how hard it would be to lose me."

He bent down and peeped roguishly into her face, but she did not smile, only looked so sadly at him that his own face grew grave, and he drew her still closer to him.

"How I shall think of you, Marjie—in the great storms especially."

"How I shall pray for you," she ended, with a break in her voice.

"Aye, do, Marjie. I will think of that."

Later, when her father was gone to bed, she called him down again.

"I am going to give you something," she said. "Will you always wear it?"

She lifted off her neck, still warm from its resting-place, a small iron cross.

"Edward," she continued, with a trembling voice, "my mother left me this especially; it is very, very old, and has been a love-token in our family for many years. See, I have made a little chain of my hair." And she kissed it and slung it around his neck.

"My darling, how dear you are," he said, gathering both her hands to him, and then, taking her head between his hands, he kissed her passionately. She strove bravely to keep back the blinding tears. "Talk to me, Marjorie—you are so good;" but words found no utterance then. "Why do you dread this voyage so? Marjorie, I *will* come back." She laid her soft hand across his mouth, while the tears ran down her face in silence. He looked gloomily into the fire. "Supposing I were drowned, what would become of thee, my Marjorie? I should not rest in my grave; I should come and haunt you."

"Don't!" she whispered, clinging to him, as though he really would. "Promise me one thing," she ended, suddenly.

"Anything."

"Supposing you were dying, or taken prisoner" (for those were troubled times), "send me the cross."

"I promise; but recollect if I am drowned I can't, so don't wait for it," he answered, with a half-bitter laugh.

"No." Then there was a pause.

"What can I give you?" he said, at last. "I have nothing, and I want you to have some token."

She looked him all over, and said, "Give me one of your buttons."

He smiled, and tugged to get off the anchor; it would not come, but on a more energetic wrench it broke away from the shank, and the gilt part remained in his hand.

"Oh, Marjorie!" he cried, in dismay.

"Never mind," she said. "I like it best so; see, it is quite flat."

And she fastened it around her neck by the string on which the cross had hung.

The next day was wild, wet and dreary, so they sat over the fire most of the time talking of their childhood, and the many happy rambles and games they had had down in the south; and of one notable day, when Marjorie had fallen over the cliff, and Edward had saved her, at the risk of his life. At this juncture in the reminiscences Mr. Fleming looked up and said:

"Aye, aye, he was always so quick."

"Too quick, sometimes," said Marjorie, smiling lovingly; "when the night father came home so late you nearly shot him for a smuggler!"

Then they all three laughed. Then on they went about that little cove by the sea, with its rocks running inward; and the fishermen's huts, and the nets hung out to dry; and the tall rock with the tiny house on it, by the harbor mouth; and the moaning bar, with the white, soft-looking surf curling over it; so cruel, so cruel, "like the tender mercies of the wicked," as Marjorie observed. And the little boats coming in and out, and the great ships sailing away in the offing. And the shells and pebbles. And the beautiful ferns that grew quite down to the water's edge. And the children's voices that echoed on the sandy beach in the long evenings after school. And the fishing boats coming home with a haul; oh! the rush and skurry; the glad surprises; the kissing of boys and mothers; the glad voices, the laughter, the joy. Then up through the village built into the cliff as it were, with its narrow street and steps up and steps down—with low cottages, smelling of tar and ropes and fish. The spinning-wheels whirring in the sun. The netters netting by the open doors. Over the top and down the

other side to a lonely and mysterious cove, with a large dark cave, half full of drift-wood and sea-weeds and shells. And with a moaning echo of wreck and wrack.

They went on capping each other till Mr. Fleming, laughing, told them he was getting tired, and they had better go and chat elsewhere. So they turned Katie out of the kitchen, told her to go mend the household linen, and undertook to boil the kettle and bake the tea-cakes. Till Katie, hearing them very quiet, and seeing it was teatime, and smelling no baking, peeped in, and—would you believe it?—there they were sitting in the window, chattering, chattering again like two old sparrows, or two very young ones; and not a bit of cake made, or so much as a cup put out. And most wonderful of all, pussy safe and sound curled by the fire and purring in a doze! Katie turned up the whites of her eyes, but said nothing, being a discreet individual, and thankful for pussy's escape. But she wisely put on the kettle to boil, and then retired with a smile that was good to see.

Those two happy hearts! They thought—and wisely in their own conceit—that no two people had ever loved each other so before. It was not only the passion of the present, but the long, long intertwining of their young lives that made them feel so entirely one. They had had such happy hours together; and the monotony, if there could have been any, was entirely broken by that five years' separation, which left always something to deduce from, or something to question. Looking back on this week afterward, one at least shuddered to think what it had been, and ever must be to them. Past intense happiness has always something mournful in it. But at that moment, gazing into each other's happy faces, which of them thought of forecasting sorrow? God forbid!

"The last day," said Marjorie to herself, rising early on the following morning, with a heavy weight on her heart. The sun came gleaming in at her lattice, and lay glancing on the floor like golden water, with a quick shiver in it.

It was noticeable that Edward whistled shrilly as he flung back his casement and leaned out, and cried "Shish! shish!" to the sparrows, and brushed back his hair in jerks. Mr. Fleming's dull cold sounded more monotonous than usual. Katie flung the duster at the cat. Marjorie drew in a long breath, smiled, and went down, wearing her smile a trifle tightly perhaps. They met without much outward sign, and talked in rather dead-alive tones on very ordinary topics, or else held long and ominous silence. Katie observed confidentially to pussy that for her part she saw no good in using her tongue, when her hands did duty. But as puss was the only recipient of this "piece of her mind," it might as well have been left unuttered.

Edward having rearranged the model of a brig on the chimney-piece for the hundredth time since his arrival, and the tenth time that morning, at length proposed a walk. At least it was something to be able to move your restless feet with some further object than wearing out one bright crimson stitch in the carpet. Marjorie was soon ready in her long gray cloak and black hood, and they started in silence.

On the ridge they paused, and looked back at the little cottage in the dell—a strange little oasis in the midst of the solemn loneliness of the moors; with its orchard in front, and its empty rick-yard and paddock at the back, all fenced in. At each end of the house stood high laurels and yews, which though they grew sparsely, served to keep off the worst of the north and east winds. The cottage was two stories high, two rooms broad, and three long; and it had high twisted chimneys, a piece of unaccountable extravagance, in which Marjorie delighted. Now, with the lattices gleaming in the sun, with the smoke curling up, and surrounded by the incessant chirping of the birds and calling of the hens, it looked cheerful and bright.

"I love that little house," said Edward, "though it is such a queer little place. In its

very oddness it is like you, Marjorie, in some ways."

Marjorie smiled. "It is a dear place," she answered earnestly; "I never cared for any house so much before."

"We must not build too many castles," continued he; "but supposing a sailor came home some day, not more than seven years hence. Very rich he might be, and he would buy a little cottage not a hundred miles away, and have a tall wife—a tall, tall wife, with fair hair and"—

"Stop, stop!" cried she, laughing and clapping her hands across his mouth. "It's unlucky to make too many plans."

And then, as her mouth quivered, and he feared she was saddling, he laughed and ended:

"You will be quite an old woman, you dear, bright Meg, and scold me all day, I suppose."

She made him an incoherent answer, and they went on up and down over the moor.

"Where are you going?" he asked at last.

"Toward Yool Farm. I feel as though I must look at it with you standing near me," she said in a sharp, quick voice full of unshed tears.

He looked at her in surprise.

"My darling! You silly Marjie?" And he drew her arm still farther within his own, but she only fixed her eyes steadily far away and made no further remark; for indeed it puzzled her own heart as to why she had this intense craving.

There they were at last, the stunted fir-trees; bending towards them with long black arms stretching south, as if to catch the two lonely figures and clasp them together as they did their own withered branches.

Involuntarily Marjorie drew still closer to her lover, and shuddered. And suddenly, why he could not define, he recollected with a tightening heart the old Dame's words: "You will never come back." He knew they had been spoken in spiteful hate, and yet at this moment they appeared to him in corporeal presence almost—standing out before him severally; and it worked on him in a sense of being lost and late, and cast away.

"Marjorie," he appealed, suddenly, "you will not forget me if I should be obliged to stay away from you beyond those five years—say even till the full seven?"

"Never," she answered, slowly and solemnly; "I could not if I tried."

"And supposing"—

"Don't suppose it—don't, don't!" she urged, with reiterating vehemence.

"Yes; but we must suppose," he continued.

"Suppose, then, you were to hear—you were to be told—I was drowned, don't widow yourself forever for my sake, Marjorie. I—I—somehow you were born to be guarded and loved; and I could not rest aright, ever so deep, if I thought you were not loved, well—entirely," and his voice sank to huskiness.

Marjorie turned very pale.

"Edward"—

"I have tried to say this all along," he broke in. "It is a hard thing for any man to say. I trust you not to give me up living—but let the dead bury their dead," he ended, solemnly; "though I trust God Almighty will bring me back to you yet. And if not—why, I have such a horror of your living lonely and uncared for, it makes me creep."

Marjorie gazed at him with great dilated eyes, but said nothing.

They did not turn homeward till the great moor mists were rolling up heavily in wreaths, like the waves of some stern, pitiless sea. It was dangerous to be out in these, Marjorie knew, and she hurried Edward. As it was, they only just reached the threshold as the mist broke like a flood, frowning and chafed on the palings of the orchard. Edward drew her in with a leap, and closed the door on the surging fog, which seemed to force past him into the cottage, and wreath up like a shroud between him and his darling, though he knew it was only the damp from their clothes. They watched

it from the parlor window—rolling on and on, and breaking against the palings. He fancied once or twice he heard a faint, far-away voice like a drowning man's calling; and a figure lost and groping, tossing wild arms mournfully in the mist, seemed to pass the orchard, and wander on forevermore mournfully lost and alone.

Again the cry rang weird and hollow.

"Good heavens! what is it?" he said out loud.

Mr. Fleming looked up.

"That cry?—a shepherd calling his sheep. It's accounted unlucky, though, to hear it. Come away from the window—do, Ned," he ended uneasily; and with a quick shudder his nephew obeyed.

Mr. Fleming retired early to bed; and, as on the first night, so now on this last, Edward and Marjorie were alone together—she thinking of the following evening when she would be alone; he of the lonely figure in the mist showing how very ill-regulated his mind was.

"We are not to stay up late, as you go early to-morrow," said Marjorie; and then they were silent again. They had drawn the little sofa to the fire, and were sitting with her head on his shoulder, and his arm around her. Her eyes were dark and heavy with unshed tears, and her pale lips kept quivering.

The wind and waters drave as before, and the mist, gloomy and heavy, kept pressing up to the window, but they were too absorbed to either hear one or see the other.

Edward kept dreamily as it were seeing that figure in the mist, as though somehow he were the phantom, and it were coming up and knocking at the door.

Marjorie was sitting by the fire with one by her side, but not himself.

And he, the phantom, said:

"Dead?"

And she answered:

"Yes—long ago."

"Marjorie!" he said aloud to break the spell.

"Yes."

"Look, what I picked to-day—such a stupid little bit." She lifted her head, and took from his fingers a tiny spray of bilberry; a little stem with six scarlet leaves. "I picked it on the ridge looking down on Yool Farm. It was so pretty in the sun, and now it is quite shriveled. Throw it away!"

She said:

"No; I will put it in my Bible, and look at it every night when I say my prayers."

"I must not keep you up."

"Only a few minutes more."

So they sat on. And again he was the figure in the mist. He came up the path, knocked at the door; saw her sitting by the fire with somebody else, and said:

"Dead?"

And she answered:

"Yes—long ago."

He broke the spell again violently:

"I want to say so much, and I can't."

She only sighed for answer. So they sat on in silence, wasting the precious time—she thinking of the coming years of lonely waiting, he of the minutes flying never to come again. The clock struck hollowly and deeply in the kitchen, as though against its will, and they both rose to go up stairs at last.

"Edward!"—she clung to him passionately—"I can't let you go!"

"Good-night, my best darling," he said, bravely. "try and sleep."

Marjorie gave way at the calm, quiet tone, and turned into her room, while he stood on the landing watching her through the half-closed door. She went straight to her bedside, and took up the little black Bible dumbly, as if with the vague feeling that there at least might be comfort.

She opened it, thinking, "Where it opens, I will lay the spray for his dear sake."

The book opened full, and her eyes fell on these words: "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country."

For an instant she remained transfixed, breath-

less, with lips apart. Then the conviction that he would never return to her, never, never, never rushed on her in such overwhelming agony and misery that, without sob or cry, she did the very weirdest thing possible. She tore the page out of the Bible. That instant, action brought reflection; sense and understanding returned. She recoiled with horror at her own act, and, falling on her knees, she moaned dumbly and inwardly for pardon, for his life.

Edward had remained listening, why he hardly knew; and now in the silence he came a little nearer and pushed the door, half terrified at the intense stillness.

"Marjorie," he said softly.

No answer.

"Marjorie, my darling."

The same silence.

Marjorie, with her arms flung wide across the bed, with her face crushed into the open Bible, was for the time being deaf even to his voice.

He thought she was praying, so with a sigh he closed the door softly and went into his own room. There he walked up and down, and up and down for very long hours; he could not hide from himself how lonely and unprotected Marjorie would be in the probable event of her father's death during his absence. Yet, what could he do? Nothing. His thoughts wandered duly to that figure in the mist again, that came up the path, knocked at the door, saw her sitting by the fire with somebody else, said, "Dead?" and she answered, "Yes—long ago." He shook himself violently and went to the window, all mist and fog. Came back, stirred the fire, said out loud, "Dead?" and heard it echo back faintly out of the night's stillness, which startled him terribly. He saw his own gray, sad, cold face in the little round glass, started again, and went and sat down by the fire listening for any further movement next door; then dozed; saw the figure coming up the path; tried to get at it, though it was himself; struggled and got at it, said, "Dead?" and it answered, "Yes—long ago," then merged into the figure, and went up the path, and—he was fast asleep.

He awoke stiff and cold next morning, hurried his few things into his tiny valise, and went down. Marjorie, pale as death, was pouring out the coffee. Mr. Fleming stretched out his hand with a nervous "Well, Ned!" Nothing more from any of them. Marjorie, with that crushed, aching feeling of "lost" at her heart, could only have spoken with a burst of tears, so was silent.

Such a morning it was too! the wind softly sighing in long breaths through the open lattice; gossamers floating about, a scent of fresh mould, birds whistling in the orchard, low sounds of content from hens and chickens; pussy on the door-step, purring in the sun. All things glad—all human hearts sorrowful unto death.

The parting was hurried over quickly, for they none of them felt very strong. Mr. Fleming stood with one hand grasping his nephew's, and gazing earnestly at him; for little he believed he should ever see him again. Three years! Marjorie, with her lover's other arm around her, and her face hidden on his breast, kept back her choking sobs with an effort that nearly killed her.

"You will never forget me, living?" he repeated, whisperingly, again and again.

And at each repetition, the girl only buried her head lower and lower, and said:

"Come back—you will come back!"

His uncle dropped his hand. "You had better go now," he said, hoarsely, and went into the kitchen.

"My darling! my darling! my darling! God keep you—guard you forever!"

He had both his arms around her now; she was folded, crushed to him with such force she was powerless.

"Ned, Ned, come back!" she sobbed.

He tore himself loose; kissed her hair, brow, eyes, mouth; crushed her hands in a last strain; and, snatching up his valise, darted from the room.

"Gone!" Oh! little word, fraught with

such Titanic comprehensiveness! Marjorie went slowly from the window, silent and tearless. All tears had been for him—her idol, her darling, her lover; but an ocean of weeping could not bring him back now, and so they were quenched. Cold and dead, her heart seemed no longer to beat, as she gazed on the bilberry spray lying on the torn leaf in her Bible: "But weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country."

BOOK II.—REUBEN.

CHAPTER I.

WAITING.

TIME passed on. The one theme of interest in Marjorie's daily life was the weather. Foolishly enough she could not divest herself of the belief that if the wind were more than usually wild and blustering, it must of necessity affect the ocean which was heaving ever so many leagues away around that one ship that was ever near in her imagination.

Often in the long dark nights she would awake suddenly, with her hair lying damp on her forehead, from a kind of vague terror, after wild dreams of wreck and wrack, to hear the wind and waters driving against the casement. Then she would sit up and pray those deep, heartfelt prayers for his safety that she had promised Edward; and, comforted by the very simplicity of the words and act, and with that pure, child-like faith in God's loving mercy which is so strong and divine in some women, she would lie back and sleep again.

Often and often her little black Bible fell open at the torn page, where the dried bilberry-spray lay; and she had learned by degrees to subdue the shuddering horror of the words, and to see through them, as it were, the promise in the beginning of the verse—that we need not weep for the dead, for they at least are at home, where we may know them safely at rest in the haven where they would be.

Mr. Fleming had never found her more loving and tender to him than now, when all love seemed enlarged in her heart and strengthened in outward working. He told her so often—holding her hands, and drawing her closer, with wistful glances in her dark, soft eyes.

She fond that thinking in the long evenings dreamily, with folded hands, would sometimes unnerve her; so she bravely sought out some brain-work. She hunted out of her father's chest a grand old mystical, philosophic work, and puzzled out so many curious problems that the golden head got quite full of a strange tangle of argumentative webs. Laughing at herself, she would bring it to her father for help. So these two fought down their united anxieties.

Reuben Yool, looking from his gable-window toward the cottage, yearned for a sight of her dear face, but could not bring himself to meet her voluntarily.

Marjorie, after the first few months, missed something out of her life unaccountably. Unknown to herself, she had learned to depend a good deal on Reuben's help and advice; and that it was his visits she missed came to her in this wise.

"Katie! no butter?" she said, one morning.

"No, miss; it's all used up, and Rowena is ill, and like to be"—

"But what did we do last winter?"

"Ah!" said Katie, mysteriously, "butter came that year."

"Now, Katie don't be silly," said Marjorie, laughing. "Where did it come from?"

"Ah! that's a year ago, that is," responded Katie, vaguely.

"Well, but—oh, I know." And then Marjorie turned scarlet, she knew not why.

"Well, that cow is not dead," said Katie, with a smile.

Marjorie made no answer. A cloud came over her face, and she went into the parlor, and closed the door.

"Father," she begun, with a little tremor in

her voice, "it is a long time since Reuben Yool was here."

"It is, my Marjie. Well, we can do without him, I suppose, though he is a good, kind, cheerful fellow."

Marjorie was silent. For the first time it flashed on her that he had ceased coming since Edward's visit. It struck her with a kind of pain, for her gentle heart rebelled at the idea of causing any one grief. How should she act? She had never been to Yool Farm in her life. She had gone close to it, around it, passed it, but never entered. For one reason, she was afraid of the "Dame," who, meeting her once on the moors, had mocked at her; and, secondly, she had no business or right there. But she knew it was the only place from which she could possibly procure butter; and it was the one thing that would tempt her father to eat breakfast, or indeed much of anything. If Reuben had only been coming, she would tell him, and he would send some at once; but as it was—as her own heart told her—it was impossible to go there.

She went out and looked at Rowena: the poor cow looked sadly—no hope of butter for a long time, or milk either.

The next morning Katie called Marjorie into the kitchen, and held up to her, with laughing eyes, a basket of butter and a pair of fowls; and at the bottom of the basket peeped out—could it be?—it was, it was—the *London Gazette*—very old, dirty, tattered, but—news.

Marjorie gave a little sharp cry, and without further thought of how all these things had come, she flew upon the paper, and devoured the shipping intelligence. There it was, the dear, dear name—the "Sea-Bird." She had been met and spoke, and all was well. Marjorie's scarlet cheeks, sparkling eyes, and parted, quivering lips were worth seeing indeed.

Katie dished the butter, hung up the fowls, and then demurely said:

"Any news, Miss Marjorie?"

"Yes, good news—all well."

And down went the head again.

"Robin is waiting," said Katie.

Marjorie sprang up.

"Where?"

"In the porch."

With the paper in her hand, she went out to where he stood gray and grim. Marjorie was so grateful to Reuben for sending her the paper that any one belonging to him was dearly welcome to her.

"Will you thank your master so much?" she began, earnestly; "it is very, very kind of him."

Robin made a kind of growl, but thawed visibly. What man could have resisted Marjorie then? Her sweet, ringing voice, her eyes glowing like two stars, her whole face and form radiant, vibrating with happiness.

"Do you think he would come?" Then she hesitated on seeing Robin's face darken, and added quickly, "Will you give him a line from me?"

"Belikes."

She fetched a sheet, and wrote a few quick word of thanks, then told him how much her father would appreciate the butter, as their cow was ill, and could he spare them a little? She longed to add, "Why don't you come and see us?" but was too shy. She folded the note and gave it to Robin, begging to keep the paper a little longer "for her father to read."

"You was to keep it." And then he raised the empty basket, put the note in his breast, and strode away in silence.

"No more manners than a sheep!" observed Katie, indignantly. "Them farm-folk never can throw you a civil word;" for Katie had a weakness for gray-haired men.

While Robin was gruffly expostulating with himself about "them women-folk, who made a mouse of a man."

"How could Reuben think of all this?" said Marjorie, delightedly inspecting the basket.

"How, indeed!" observed Katie, hypocritically and ingeniously.

The *Gazette* enlightened Mr. Fleming and his child considerably as to the state of Europe,

which was in a terrible stage of turmoil and war. Napoleon was at the height of his triumphant and wonderful career. The following day brought a large jug of milk, and some more butter, with a verbal message that this supply would be continued as long as they required it; but Reuben remained invisible, and Marjorie wracked her thoughts in vain as to the means by which she might thank him.

The spring came on; summer—winter—but yet no Reuben. Twice she had caught sight of him. Once in this wise: She was walking on the moors, and caught sight of him at some distance; she hurried eagerly toward him, but long before she was within hail he had outstripped her pace and passed down into one of the numerous hollows.

And then she fell ill with a kind of low fever; and he came to ask how she was. "How did he know she was ill?" she wondered. She heard his voice, and weak as she was she had staggered to the door and half-way down stairs, to thank him for all his kindness. But he heard her voice. For when she called faintly to him, Katie told her, he started up and left the house, and she saw him from her window striding over the moors at a fearful pace.

This was a terrible winter. The wind rose one night and worked itself into such mad fury it could not lay itself again. It seemed to lean against the very walls of the cottage, and press them with iron force till they creaked, rocked, and groaned with the strain. The waters were out; two people were lost on the moors in the snow, and Reuben and his men were out two days and a night searching. Too late, their quest ended. When found, the weary wights were stiff and dead. The winds died down, and the snow came on, and on, and on. Day by day the drifts deepened; the great apple-tree was half buried, the cow-shed was a myth—all communication was cut off—and this went on for weeks. And then again the wind rose out of the calm; and awful indeed was its coming again. The little cottage shook to its foundations; the apple-tree was laid low; the cow-shed was unroofed.

Every night Marjorie went to bed feeling that ere light came they might be crushed by the falling of the chimney-stack. The casements rattled loudly, the keyhole whistled as with an eerie laugh. Marjorie thought of the wild winds raving like a bereft and demented thing over the snow-fields on the moors, of wandering people straying and dying helpless and unholpen; would pray till she slumbered from exhaustion; would awake with a fierce hand rattling at the casement—the very grip of death with skeleton fingers. Voices cried to her out of the night's lonesomeness, and she would start up and echo wildly, "Yes! yes! I am coming!" then fall back, shaking in each limb with the dull horror of the thing. How fervently she grew to thank God Edward was far, far away from England; for the wrecks all around Great Britain, Holland, and France were appalling in number.

When her heart was sick with longing a light came down on her life. One evening late a knocking came at the door—a farm servant with a packet.

"Measter had been to the town, and brought back this for Mistress Fleming."

With hands so trembling with agony of longing she could hardly hold the paper, she tore it open. A long, long sea-letter—a regular journal.

"Reuben sends me all the good of my life," she said, passionately, and then buried herself deep in the letter, so loving, so tender, so full of cheerfulness and sympathy. After the beginning, "My darling," her eyes, hot with tears, could hardly get farther for the joy of it; but by degrees and little bits, she managed to draw out the very essence of it. And oh! what joy!—he said that the expedition would only last five years instead of the full seven! When Marjorie read these words, with the precious letter tightly clasped in her trembling hand, she felt as though all those nights of lonely watching and fervent prayer were paid in full. "God is so good!" she mur-

mured to herself ever between the reading. "Only three more years, and then"—

It had darkened outside—darkened so much that the iron bars of the window stood out quite light. Katie was closing the shutters. Mr. Fleming was watching the fire; pussy purred at his feet. It all looked so peaceful, so happy, so quiet, that Marjorie laid her letter in her bosom, and went toward the fire and her father, saying:

"Father, father—I am so happy! Everything seems coming right at once!"

He smiled, and gathering one of her hands in his, answered:

"Well, my bonnie bird, when things went wrong, you never let me know."

They talked for very long over that letter—of how prosperous Ned's private venture promised to be, of the shortening of the voyage, and many, many other things. Mr. Fleming seemed quite exhausted at last by the talking and excitement; he grew quiet and thoughtful, and leaned back in silence, playing with his fingers—twisting one over the other, and back again. Suddenly he said,

"Reuben Yool is a good man."

"He is, indeed," said Marjorie, with a bright look; "and so very thoughtful. Fancy sending over this afternoon in all the wet. I wish I could thank him."

"I thoroughly respect and esteem him," continued her father, earnestly. "If anything were to happen to me, I am sure he would look after you, and take care of you."

Marjorie held her letter a little more closely, and said, "I should not require it," with just the faintest shade of antagonism in her voice.

"Yes, I am sure he would," he went on, as though he had not heard her.

"It seems to me, he takes care of me as it is," she answered, smiling; and getting up, she walked to the window, and leaned her brow against it—looking dreamily out through the mist and the snow, and seeing vaguely, in thought, the night when they had come home so late, and the mist had broken behind them on the palings.

"It is not so very long to wait," pursued her father, in a low, muttering tone, that roused and fixed her attention more than any loud talking would have done. "If Ned comes home, then, and marries her, all well—three years go quickly, most of all to the dead, one would think. Reuben Yool would have been as good; but girls are willful, we know—and three years go quickly. If he comes back"—

His voice died away, and a great horror fell on Marjorie's sometime happy heart.

"Father," she began, in a trembling voice, "do you feel ill to-night?" And going to him, she laid her hands on his, which were shaking equally with her own.

"No, my dear—no." But he answered vaguely, as one talking from a distance. "No, my dear; but I am sleepy and tired: bed is the best place for me. I am weakly this cold weather—I always was."

He looked up at her, as though partially aware how strange his voice and manner were; then gave in again, let his head fall forward on his hand, and his heavy eyes close.

Marjorie stood watching him uneasily.

"Marjorie, my darling," he began again, half inarticulately, "it is not so very long—only three years; I think it might be done—don't you? Would you try, Marjorie? He looked up, knitting his brows in painful confusion, as though trying to seize and measure a thought that ever escaped him. "You know it is not so much what has been—one forgets dead love—but respect and esteem are great things. And you could respect him, Marjorie. If he had lived, why then it would be love—but love dies; and so"—He broke off, holding her hand, and gazing now with a fixed stare into one corner of the room beyond her. "I don't mean to grieve you, Ned, my boy. Only you would not have her lonely and uncared for, either. I know you love her too well for that—and what are we all but a terror and a great grief when dead? My God!"—

It was with a half sob in his voice that he ended.

Marjorie was spell-bound; but with the cessation of his voice came life and energy to the rescue.

"Do come to bed, father," she said, steadying her voice by a supreme effort, and trying to rouse him by touch and tone; for again his head had fallen forward—this time, on his breast.

"Tell me, Marjie, do you think you could do it?"

"Father, dear father, come to bed; you are tired and ill."

She was kneeling by him now, and had drawn his cold, shaking hands against her warm throat.

He looked up again, and his voice was hollow, and his face was haggard.

"Marjie, if he had lived, I would never have asked it of you; but as it is"—Marjorie shook like death—"as it is, Marjie—as he is dead"—

Something weird and powerful rose within the girl's heart, and she said:

"Who is dead?"

But the answer made her scream wildly, and Kate came flying in.

It was very long before they could get him up-stairs. He said he was not ill, and would only stand murmuring inarticulately, and with a fixed gaze into a certain corner of the room, to which—darkened as it was by a heavy old oak press—neither Marjorie nor Katie dared lift their eyes. At length he sat down, and seemed to doze; and then between them—shaking and white—they contrived somehow to get him to bed.

Marjorie took off her heavy dress, and sat down by his side. They had stayed so for some hours, as it seemed to her, when he said suddenly, "Dead!—so it might be!"—and then lay staring blankly at the night. The girl hid her face, shuddering. At intervals he went on thus, with long silences between, but he never addressed her personally, which was the more awful.

Once he started up wildly, and then she laid a firm hand on him, and he turned at once and lay down again. She found that by some, to her inexplicable, power, her touch calmed him; so she retained it through the night. And the wind and water drave wildly, and only one heard it now, sitting alone and praying by the sick man's bed. Down in the parlor the shroud-like shadow lay more distinct than ever, and had now and then a heave in the shuddering light that was utterly ghastly, and looked like a sudden hand rising and protesting, "Not dead yet!" Katie sat in the kitchen, dozing before the fire—jumping up wildly now and then at some fancied call, and collapsing with a forward plunge on finding it imaginary.

In the cold, gray stare of the early dawn Marjorie called softly to Katie, who went up drowsily.

"Katie, will you watch? I must go to the farm for help. I think it is the beginning only, and he may want a man's arm." And she cast a fearful glance at the propped-up figure on the bed, breathing in those long fever-gasps—the precursors of much suffering. "He is very ill." And with a sigh of exhaustion she sank into her chair again, and added, "It has been an awful night."

"I'll go, Miss Marjie, dear— it's blowing that terrible."

"No—I must fetch Reuben myself."

Katie fetched her black hood and long gray cloak, and she started at once, while the maid took Puss for company, and sat in Mr. Fleming's room.

CHAPTER II.

TO THE RESCUE.

THERE was a long blank light in the east—like the last smile on a dead man's face. A strong blast, wet with battling with the storms that had raged all night on the moors, drove her before it, and piled the dull leaden clouds to windward, leaving, as the dawn gathered

strength, great gaps and fissures in the sky, that looked like chasms and peeps of another world.

With her hood drawn tightly round her face, and the long cloak twisted round her, she held herself together, bent her head low to avoid the buffeting wind, and hurried on her way with her lips tightly set, thinking of the past miserable night, of her father's sudden illness, of his fearful wanderings. She thought then no night could ever again be so sad—as we are all apt to do in actual present pain of body or mind. Wait!

Strong-hearted as Marjorie was, she had from her childhood been deeply imbued with the superstition of the times. Her loving heart shrank at her father's dreary ravings, and a cold feeling of horror made her clasp her hands involuntarily and pray for Edward's safety, as she thought of the monosyllabic reiteration. She had forgotten, in her preoccupation of thought, the distance to the farm; and when she caught sight suddenly of the fir-trees clashing their arms together, as though in triumph, she began to believe herself under a spell, and to think that they were weaving a circle around her from which there could be no escape. A short sob rose in her throat, thinking of the last time she had seen them.

A sudden light struck the old chimneys; a bell rang. What if Reuben should be gone before she could reach the priory! The thought struck her with alarm and she ran hurriedly down the slope; nor did she pause till actually touching the little gate, let into the solid old wall. She had never been so near before, and stood for a second irresolute; but her need was urgent. The click of the latch awoke such a hubbub of dogs' voices to the rear of the house that she shrank back.

A rough voice shouted, "Hold your noise!" Then steps came round the projecting wall, and Robin appeared. He looked startled, and said rudely:

"Good lack, Miss Marjorie!"

"Is Reuben Yool at home?"

"Aye."

"Can I see him?"

Robin smiled sourly, and muttered:

"It's paying! Oh! what fools them women be! When, to think now, he was going over this very day!"

He made no response to her question, but stood with his hands in his pockets, scowling at her grimly.

"Can I see him?" asked the girl again.

"Maybe ye'd not be welcome."

"Oh, do let me in!" pleaded Marjorie, piteously, trembling all over—"my father is so very ill."

"Belikes ye'd be none the more welcome," he reiterated.

"Oh, he will forgive me; do let him in," she urged, struggling with the latch.

"Did I say it were he?" demanded Robin, fiercely.

She did not heed him now, for the latch had sprung suddenly and torn her tender palm; nor did she heed that—the catch had yielded. Afterward, in later times, it used to strike her vaguely how hard it had been for her to get into Reuben's house that first time.

Robin saw the wounded hand.

"If you be's that willful, go!" he said, standing back to let her pass.

"You might have helped me," she said, quietly, as she twisted her cloak round her hand.

"Come," he said laconically, and led her round the house. "Take care!" he added, and caught her sharply to one side as they passed close to the kennel of a huge mastiff. The dog growled savagely, and made a half rush, but shrunk back on catching Robin's eye and a word of command to "Lie still!" On reaching the Refectory, Robin called gruffly, "Wanted," and Reuben, who was finishing his breakfast, sprang erect on seeing Marjorie.

Involuntarily, as it were, she stretched out both hands toward him. He looked so strong and so quiet that he gave her confidence at once, and then she spoke.

"Oh, Reuben, my father is so ill. Could you come and see him?"

"Have you walked all this long way?" he questioned, eagerly and quickly.

"Yes, I have. But will you come?"

"I will, at once."

She gave a quick sob or two—half of thankfulness, half of exhaustion—and said:

"Oh, Reuben, you are so good to me!"

"Not at all," he answered, gravely. "May I offer you some coffee?"

Without waiting for answer, he poured out some strong, hot coffee, and placed it before her, but she pleaded:

"Only come at once."

"I will. But drink that first."

It was quicker to obey than refuse, and she drank. It did her so much good that she looked up quite differently, and said, with a quivering smile,

"I think I was tired."

He made no answer, but, fetching a large rug, bade Robin bring round his horse.

"Are you going to ride?" asked Marjorie. "I am so glad—you will get there much quicker."

He looked at her gently, and said, "We will go together;" and lifting a sheepskin dyed blue, led her round to the front of the house. Bruin was still there growling.

"What a splendid dog!" began Marjorie, for her spirits had risen; she no longer felt lonely and forsaken.

Reuben went up to him and unchained him, keeping a heavy hand on him, and said, looking down into his brown, intelligent eyes, "Bruin, go to the lady," touching Marjorie as he spoke. The dog walked up to her, wagging his tail, and she laid a fearless hand on his great head, and bending down, spoke to him.

"That will do; he knows you now. Lie down, sir."

The dog retreated wistfully. His master laid the blue sheepskin across the horse, and without a word lifted Marjorie up, and tied the rug round her feet.

"For me?" was all Marjorie had time to say. "How very comfortable! I must have been very tired, I think now."

Reuben smiled gravely, slung the bridle across his arm, and strode out and away in silence, merely bidding Robin, "See to everything."

"Which means, dunnow when I shall be back," muttered the man, watching those two climbing the steep ascent till they dipped down over the opposite edge and were out of sight.

Reuben never spoke, but turned now and then to wind the rug more closely round her when the wind was too boisterous; and Marjorie was so tired and drowsy in the loss of responsibility and exertion that she was well content to remain silent too, and let the rain, which had begun more heavily than ever, drift against her face in cold splashes.

Katie came down to meet them with a face of thankfulness.

"It was awful lonesome, and him going on about the dead men," she said, by way of greeting.

Reuben thought Mr. Fleming very seriously ill, and deliberated whether he had not better ride at once twenty miles for the nearest doctor, but finally decided to wait till the evening. He drew off his rough coat, and said simply:

"I will stay and watch, if you like, Miss Marjorie."

"Thank you," she answered; and so it was settled.

Reuben sat and watched, and Marjorie came in and out at short intervals. She spoke to her father once or twice, but only received a blank stare, or the muttered words, "Dead—so it might be!"—words which always made her shrink back with pain. "I wonder if he knows me," thought Reuben, closing the door upon Marjorie after the last time she came up. He went up to the bed, and looked at the sick man, but the heavy, closed eyes gave no response, nor the restless fingers clutching at the bed-clothes. The action was irritating. Reuben drew the sheet over them, and returned to his

post by the fire, thinking, "I doubt if he will ever get up again, and then"—The end of the thought knit his brow.

The sick man lay muttering, "Dead—dead—dead!" till Reuben got up again and came and stood by him; this time the heavy eyelids rose, and the eyes looked at him with a sudden gleam of intelligence: "Tell me, if so it might be?" The wandering fingers came toward him, and he involuntarily recoiled; the light died out of the questioning face, and the head tossed wearily.

"Is it anything I can do for you, Mr. Fleming?" said Reuben, bending down.

No answer came but the fever moan of "Dead—dead—dead!"

What had come to him? Who was dead? Who could tell? Throughout the day Mr. Fleming lay thus half in stupor, half raving. Katie and Marjorie, sitting in the kitchen with the door open, could hear each word, and looked away from each other. Early in the evening Reuben came down and said:

"Miss Marjorie, I am going for the doctor. We can do nothing."

"Is he very ill?" questioned Marjorie, wistfully.

"I fear so. It is, I think, some great chill—" And then he turned away that she might not see the dread in his face. He thought he heard her sob. "It may not be so bad as I fear," he added; "but at least it is safer to go for advice. I cannot be back till very late. Don't sit up, Miss Marjorie."

She heard him go round, fetch out his horse, and ride away, and going up to sit by her father, saw him riding over the eastern ridge, with his head bent down as though urging his horse to speed extreme.

Mr. Fleming lay quiet now, only forever working with those restless fingers; now and then he raised his head as though he missed some one, but when she touched him he quieted down again. Once he startled her by saying:

"Gone?"

She thought he meant Reuben, and said:

"Yes."

"What for?"

She dreaded saying the doctor, so made no reply.

"Never mind," he said, gathering her hand to him; "he is gone for it, I suppose."

"What, dear father?"

But he was already dozing again. Katie brought up some tea, but he could not touch it; the little lamp came up and had its shade put on, so that it cast only a faint gleam in one corner. The day had been fine, but now it was blowing up for a storm; and the moaning of the wind in the chimney became instinct with a dreadful thought to Marjorie. What if her father were to die before Reuben could return? The idea struck her at last with such force, seeing how very still he lay, that, as the dread became rampant, she called softly to Katie; but Katie was asleep below. Marjorie was too unselfish to awaken her, so she returned from the stairhead where she had gone to call her, and knelt down by her father's bed. The shadow of the room fell across the upper part of his face, leaving a broad band of light over the colorless lips, which parted now and then and re-closed soundless.

The effect of the distinct light and shade was dreadful—producing the impression of the jaw being tied up—and Marjorie placed herself so that her shadow hid the light. How quiet he lay; Marjorie kept one hand on his heart, praying for Reuben's speedy return. The wind and water drave mournfully over the moor, and to the girl's excited and overwrought imagination invisible hands moved the door, eerie voices cried "Hush!" and the echo of the monotonous murmur of those sad words she had heard repeated so often in the long, past hours came back to her out of the darkness. Was he really speaking? No; the lips did not move; or, if they did, so faintly that no sound was audible.

Marjorie shuddered together in spasms now and then, but kept herself motionless

by the exercise of extreme self-control. Tick, tick, tick—only the clock down-stairs. The gate in the paddock swung to and fro, and the winds and waters drave. She listened, with the blood rushing wildly through her veins; but all was still—still with a deathly stillness. The lamplight seemed to grow more faintly funereal as the boom! boom! of the wind went thundering round the cottage like minute-guns of a ship in distress. A great, white, headless thing stood up nodding at her and making her heart stop beating for a second, but it was only the sheet hung over the lattice.

"Oh, God, help!—Oh, God, help!" sighed Marjorie. She did not dare to move, though cramped to pain in the position she was in, for her hand was on her father's heart—so she went on praying, mechanically almost, with a vague sense of safety in the rhythm of the simple Lord's Prayer.

Suddenly a clock struck with what seemed a perfect passion of sound: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve! At the last stroke—ending with a rattled whir, like a gasping scream—Mr. Fleming reared himself up in bed, and cried hoarsely, "Dead! my God!" then with a plunge fell out of bed.

Marjorie's sharp cry of terror brought Katie flying up-stairs, and between them they raised him, and laid him up against Marjorie's knee. They could get him no farther, for he was a dead weight, and he moaned and shrank so when touched that Marjorie forbade Katie to make any further attempts.

"God A'mighty!" sobbed Katie, wiping the tears from her eyes, "have mercy on us, two lone females, saving the cat!"

Marjorie felt such a strong inclination to utter a wild scream of laughter at these words, that she bit her lips till they bled.

"Go down, Katie; do be ready to let them in; he won't move again."

She was alone, with her father's head upon her knee, and clasping him around with her loving arms; and she prayed as she had never prayed before for succor and help. She still kept one hand on his heart, and it beat but faintly.

Once he made a sharp movement toward his mouth—he was lying in such deep shadow, she remarked nothing; but he moved again, and then bending lower over him, she noticed that his lips were wet. She touched them, and holding her hand up to the light, found it stained with blood. She raised him a little higher, and her very heart went out in her cry for Katie—when the gate clanged, hurried feet came along the flags, and two seconds later Reuben and the doctor were in the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

THEY lifted him out of her arms and laid him on the bed.

"Hum!" was all the remark made by the doctor; and Marjorie was only sensible of being tenderly carried to her own room by Reuben, and hearing his voice saying as gently and pityingly as any woman, "Rest."

She turned her weary head away, and fell asleep with perfect childlike trust in his strength and knowledge of what was best.

It was daylight when she awoke and went to her father's room; the door was locked, and, with a sudden, nameless terror, she turned and ran down-stairs. The kitchen door was open, and Katie sat swaying backward and forward with her apron over her head.

"Katie! my father?"

Katie sprang up with a scared expression, and, dashing some cold water into a basin, began washing some cups and saucers.

Marjorie went up to her nearly breathless.

"Katie; my father?" she said, hoarsely.

"Better, better," reiterated Katie, flinging water right and left, and breaking two cups at once.

Marjorie seized the wet and working hands.

"For pity's sake, Katie, only tell me the truth!"

"I mean nothing whatever," assured Katie, with involuntary mendacity, and turning very pale.

"Why have they locked his door, then? I will go!" burst out Marjorie, with sudden passion, and, breaking from the maid, who now tried in turn to hold her, she ran up-stairs. The door stood ajar now; the doctor and Reuben stood consulting. She went in very softly. Her father was propped up, with wet towels round his head, and was breathing thickly and heavily. Reuben saw her and started back, putting up both hands. The doctor turned sharply, and then hustled her out of the room before him, closing the door.

"Your father is very ill, mistress," he began; "but better now. Have you any self-control?" he ended abruptly, turning her round to the passage window.

"Yes, if I am wanted," she answered quietly.

He softened again.

"There, there—go down, poor child!" She asked if she might not see her father again. "No, not at present—safer not." Reuben and he would do all they could. He couldn't stay long, though, and there was no time to spare. "Fine man, that Reuben Yool: well-developed, magnificent constitution—need never fear illness for him.—Woman!" (this was shouted down the stairs) "mistress coming down—look sharp!" Then, as Marjorie slowly turned, he said, "You may come up again soon; father better—very ill, though; might not pull through, might pull through—who knows? Go down, now, and wait a bit. Let me look at you. Fine eye, clear skin—healthy young woman; father better; always hope for the best, always prepare for the worst; I might die; you might die, any body might die; friends might die; every body might die; nobody might die. Father very ill; think of that; don't think much of what that woman says. Keep quiet, poor thing!" And with a parting pat and murmur of "Every body might die, nobody might die," he pushed her gently down-stairs.

Rather bewildered, Marjorie arrived in the kitchen deeply impressed with Reuben's look of horror on seeing her. "Did she look ill? No, not very," looking at herself in the little mirror, "only sorrowful and tired." The cat rubbed up against her, and she lifted Puss with a heavy, sick feeling, and crept silently into her pet corner. She sat thinking dully of her father's terrible illness, and the doctor's strange refrain kept rising and falling in a weird monotone with the puck! puck! of the flame round the kettle: "I might die, you might die, any body might die, nobody might die."

She said it to herself over and over dreamily, till, unawares, she said it aloud, on which Katie, who had been bustling about, gave such an awful start that she started too, and wondered at herself for saying it, but made no remark.

Katie watched her furtively out of the corner of her eye, but did not speak; and now and then the tears welled slowly down her cheeks, and she sniffed and wiped them quickly.

Marjorie was far away then, thinking of Edward; of how glad she was he could not know her grief and trial—for then how sad he would be, too—and yet how intensely she longed for his sympathy and love.

At length the doctor came down. His eyes met Katie's, and said, "Told?" and her eyes fell and answered, "No;" and he shook his head, and called Marjorie into the parlor, bidding her sit down, and then roaming round the room, pushing the chairs about uneasily, said, "Hum! your father might be worse—only came just in time. Don't think he will ever be really strong again, and any great shock would kill him probably." He then asked how long he had been ill, etc. Finally he asked for something to eat, and said while taking it that he could stay no longer, but must return home.

Marjorie had brought him food and then retired to the window, where she sat quietly unaware how furtively he regarded her, or how he and Katie were all the time making signs to each other in reference to her, he evidently in-

sisting on something at which Kate recoiled, and retired weeping into the kitchen. Marjorie must have been partially stunned, for she perceived nothing of all this.

He ate heartily, and then, rising, said he would go up for one parting look, and send Reuben down for some refreshment. As he went up he met Kate in the doorway. His eyes asked, "Told?" and hers, falling, answered, "No;" whereat he shook his head and went on.

Presently Reuben came down. He was deadly pale, and touched nothing. Marjorie felt so deeply grateful to him for all he had done and was doing for them that she could not bear to sit idle and watch him. But she was choking with fatigue and sorrow, and could not speak. Katie poured out some hot coffee, and then, looking warningly at Reuben, closed the kitchen door, and when safely behind it threw her apron over her head and sobbed wildly.

The doctor's voice whispered huskily down the stairs, "Is he telling her?"

To which Kate groaned out, "Yes."

"Hum!" and he went back again.

Reuben had got up, cleared his throat, and sat down again. Marjorie moved the cup closer to him, and went and stood by the window.

She was far away again, and Reuben drew something rustling from his breast and tried to undo the folds of it with trembling hands. She made a sudden movement, and he thrust it under the table, and drank some coffee. At last he could bear it no longer, and got up, pushing away his plate and making a step toward the door.

"The doctor is going now, isn't he?" she asked.

"Yes."

"But you will stay, Reuben?" and she advanced toward him timidly.

"Yes, if you wish."

Her chest heaved. "I don't know how to thank you," she said, with a half sob; "you are so good and kind to me. But"—

"I will stay as long as I can be of any use," he answered quickly. "You need not think about it, Miss Marjorie."

"My father is really better, is he not? The doctor said so."

"Yes—he is," was the reply in a half-stifled voice.

She did not notice the emphasis.

"I may come up later, and then you will rest," she said gratefully.

He moved round from her, and went sharply into the kitchen, and she followed him in. Katie looked up. He shook his head. "I can't," he said. "Wait."

Half an hour later and the doctor was gone. Marjorie was sitting by the fire watching the flames going puck! puck! round the kettle, and Katie was sitting dozing. It was all so quiet and peaceful that Marjorie clasped her hands and said her usual evening prayer. She had a foolish way of holding Ned's button between her folded hands while so doing; it seemed to bring him nearer her. Afterward she took his letter from the folds of her dress, where it lay night and day, and read it slowly through and through again. "Only three years!" She said it out loud, with such a happy smile on her face. Her words awoke Katie, who sat up and looked round uneasily. "Katie, it was only I who spoke. Listen: Edward comes home in three years"—

"Oh, now, don't—don't!" cried Katie, beginning to sob. "What's the good of saying them things?"

"What's the good?" echoed Marjorie, bewildered.

"I won't stop and listen to them—I won't!" sobbed Katie, "so it's no use. I'll just go away," and she got up and went out.

"Katie must be dreaming," thought the girl. "What can she mean?"

A few days passed on. Mr. Fleming got better—but very, very slowly. He hovered awfully near the brink of death, and its waters lapped on the shores round him with dread distinctness. Marjorie would sit in his room for hours together—he holding her hand and

gazing at her; but he never spoke; he seemed fully aware of the danger of the slightest exertion, for everything was done by signs.

Reuben would ride backward and forward to the farm, never being absent for more than a few hours at a time. He was more than careful of Marjorie—saving her the very least care and trouble—divining what she wanted by some subtle instinct of his own—but he hardly ever addressed her in words. He kept out of her reach in a way that began at last to make her think he dreaded her—only why should he, or could he?

Katie, too, would watch her in such an unaccountable manner, and sighed so often and so heavily, that the girl gradually became seriously uneasy. Once or twice, also, when she stole down stairs late at night, she had found her sobbing and crying. Once, the last time, she had come down so extremely quietly (her father being in a doze), that the woman had no time to conceal her tears, even in her usual superficial manner.

"Katie, what is the matter?" she asked, quickly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing," said Katie, with the tears streaming down her face. "I don't think I am crying."

Marjorie could not help smiling. "Not crying, my poor Katie? fie! what a fib!" and she drew her finger down one wet cheek. "What is the matter? are you ill?"

"No," said Katie, trying to get away.

But the girl held her. "Not about my father, then? He is much better. Katie, what can it be?"

"I must have been cutting onions," said Katie, vaguely. "Them always makes you cry."

"But, Katie, I see no onions. What is it, Katie, dear?—tell me. I am so sorry for you."

This gentle admonition completely upset Katie. She nearly howled.

"I won't tell you!" she sobbed; "let him tell you—he knows."

"Who's him?" asked Marjorie, gradually becoming alarmed. "Katie, who's him?"

"I won't tell you!" answered Katie, more stoutly than before, and more mysteriously than ever.

Reuben standing at the kitchen door, had heard the whole conversation.

"It is I," he said, coming forward.

"And what have you to tell?" asked Marjorie.

"It's very hard to tell," he said, hoarsely. Suddenly—how, she never could afterward define—it flashed on her it must be about Edward. She dropped Katie's hands, and Reuben made a sign to Katie to leave them, which she did, sobbing.

Miss Marjorie, you must sit down," he said, quietly and gravely.

She obeyed. "I know what is coming—Edward is ill." His face changed under her eyes. "You have heard from him, and you have dared to keep it from me!" Her indignant, burning face, her almost threatening hand had turned him sick with sorrow for her.

"It is not that," he said, bewildered at seeing the gentle girl so transformed, and wildly trying to break it gently. "I have kept nothing from you—till too late." His voice fell, but she heard it.

"Reuben, Reuben! tell me! Quick, quick, quick! What is it? Oh, Reuben, tell me! Pity!—mercy!" She caught his arm, and staggered up against him in her terror of what was coming.

"He is dead," he said, then caught at her quickly, as she reeled to one side.

She freed herself instantly.

"The proof!" she said, fevered and sharply, in an unearthly tone that thrilled him; and she caught a table fiercely to steady herself.

"Here." He drew from his pocket a folded paper, old and dirty: "On the first inst., foundered during a gale at sea H.M. S. 'Sea-Bird.'"

The room grew smaller and smaller, the walls whirled round and round, a despairing cry rang in her ears; the waves roared, then sank into a

sobbing wail, and Marjorie fell fainting at Reuben's feet.

"Oh, Marjorie, my darling! if I could only have saved you this hour at the cost of my own life!" he thought, as he lifted her on to the long settle and fetched Katie.

CHAPTER IV.

ALONE.

"God hath forsaken!" went up the cry from the girl's nearly broken heart, as, left alone at last—after many urgent and nearly frantic appeals for solitude—she lay across her bed straggling back the wild, agonized sobs that shook her nearly to death. In one hand she crushed the paper, the *London Gazette*, in the other she clinched the button he had given, with such force and anguish as to bear for many days the impress of the anchor on her tender palms. She sat up, choking—talking wildly to herself, half audibly: "I knew it—knew it! I shall never see him again! Edward—Edward—Edward!"—the last word in a frenzied cry that shook the very room—"my darling, my darling. Oh! God—God—God!"—then she was on her knees, sobbing and moaning, and rocking herself backward and forward—"after all my prayers!" And she raised herself and lifted her defiant brow. "Oh, God! after all my prayers!" The great passion subsided after a while; worn out, she lay back against the bed, and the anxious watchers retired from the door, where they had stayed when she turned them out.

Reuben and Katie held advice in Mr. Fleming's room in whispers. What was to be done? They dared not tell him. Could they rely on Marjorie's self-control? Katie said yes; he looked doubtful. Now that, weak with long watching, she had at last broken down, they hardly dared trust her. This was her night of watching, and when he thought of her he quite shook.

There were yet two hours to wait. Katie wanted to take her some food, but he urged that she should be left quiet; for if she fell asleep, it might do her more good than anything. Fell asleep! with that burning brow and breaking heart! Oh! Reuben Yool did not know the girl, nor would he for many years.

Katie went sorrowfully back to the kitchen, and he remained watching, with Mr. Fleming's door open, so as to hear if she went down; but time went on and she never moved. He got up once or twice, went to her door and listened; no sound, no movement. She was half sitting, half kneeling, with all the things he had ever given her laid out around her—the feather fans, the Cordova cushion, the shells—and amidst this wreck, as it were, the Bible lay open at that passage, "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country." Her eyes seemed fixed on those words by some terrible and awful spell. The little button was pressed against her bosom, and she was very, deathly pale; but she had stopped weeping; the words, so full of desolation, had that power over her at least. The loose page shook under her trembling breath, and the spray of bilberry swayed, but that was the only sign of emotion near her. It seemed to her, now the first passion was over, that all along she had not thought he would return; and he had thought so too, but not in that last letter. Ah! what a happy letter it had been!—how she had rejoiced over it!—and now—

"Reuben"—in all his life Reuben had never seen anything so white and broken as the girl now standing before him; she led him out on to the landing—"tell me all," she said.

"I rode into W—, to fetch the doctor, as you know, Miss Marjorie, and saw lying on his table the *London Gazette*, and in it"—He paused.

"Go on," she said, very low, with a dreary, hopeless look in her eyes that made him quiver.

"Well, I brought it home for you; and first

I inquired about it all I could. They say it is well known that at that time a most awful gale raged through that part; several ships have been totally lost, and the 'Sea Bird' among others; and that is all." He stopped, then added quickly and huskily, "I would have borne anything rather than have been the one to tell you, Miss Marjorie."

She gave him her hand, so small and burning with fever. "You were always good to me," she said. "Forgive me if I spoke cruelly to you just now—I could not bear it."

"God help you!" he said sadly. "I wonder you do not hate me."

She made no answer, but went into her father's room—only just turning back to say, "We must not tell him."

"No; but I think he knows," said Reuben. "It is strange, but he seems to have divined it in some mysterious way."

All through the night Marjorie sat by her father, with her hand in his—white to her very lips, but never speaking. He was worse again, and kept muttering, "Dead!"—so it might be! but she never fainted or failed; and when at last the dawn came—gloriously beautiful—over the waste, and Reuben entered to take her place, she passed out and went to her own chamber silently, and, clasping her hands over her bosom, lay down to rest.

Alas! alas! she could no longer say his name now in her weakness, and the heavy lids fell on bitter, burning tears; but there was no longer that sense of indignation, too strong to be borne, and that half madness, there had been; she only kept on thinking dully, "Nevermore! nevermore!" and the soft wailing wind came whispering up against the lattice, and lulled her into sleep and happy dreams. Marjorie felt after a few days that she ought not to allow Reuben to remain any longer at the cottage. All this time he ought to be at the farm, busy with preparations for the coming spring. Still it was very hard to bid him go—he was so much to her in many ways. Reuben knew quite well what was passing in her mind, but was resolved not to say the first word. However, she spoke to him at last; she told him—as he knew—how much better her father was; that now he no longer required a man's strong arm, and that thus she could not think of retaining him at the cottage. He was silent, and neither assented nor dissented.

"If you would come over occasionally and see us," she went on. "I hope he may not require you, but it would be something to rely on if I knew you would come sometimes." He bowed his head in silence. "No words could ever thank you for what you have been to us," she added, with the tears in her eyes. "I can never repay you." And she turned and went toward the window.

He had looked up at her suddenly, but his eyes fell again on her retreating. There was a pause, and then he said:

"You wish me to go to-day?"

"Yes, we ought not to keep you longer, you have been so generous in staying."

He left the room, and she sat down in one of her listless, weary, heartsick moods, that she only dared allow herself in the rare times when alone, and which, strangely enough, seemed to do her good—not the morbidness of them, but the relaxation from the continual strain that she bore when before any one. She had sat thus for a short space of time, when she heard horse-hoofs rattling before the door, and went out. Reuben sprang into the saddle.

"I am going," he said, "but will come every day and ask after Mr. Fleming."

That was all—he bid her no adieu. She strove to speak, with her hand on the horse's neck, but no words would come, and he gathered his reins together, bowed gravely, and rode away.

"He is so good," she murmured, and went back with such a heavy sigh, and from her father's window watched the solitary rider dip over the ridge and disappear; only one week before she had brought him home. She wondered if she had wounded him by her abrupt

dismissal; she hoped not; now she thought of it, how far more gently and gratefully she might have said it, only when feeling strongly one rarely expresses one's meaning. Oh! she trusted she had not hurt him; he was so quiet you could never tell what he was really feeling. She was half remorseful now for having told him to go. A feeble moan from her father roused her, and she went back to him. Two months passed on; Mr. Fleming grew decidedly better, but his strength seemed to wane more than ever; he required the most incessant and watchful care, and Katie grew to think he did his utmost to send Marjorie about. All this time he had not yet spoken, only would lie watching his child with his great hollow gray eyes, so mournfully, so sadly. Doubtless it was a merciful dispensation that Marjorie should be incessantly occupied at this time. During the day she held up, but the night was the awful part, when she would retire to her room, close the door, and stand for a few seconds with her lips set, and her clasped hands pressed on her heart, striving to keep back the aching which nearly sickened her. Then, then, she would realize he was gone—lost, lost—and her head would sink with such a deep, miserable sigh, she could not go to rest—thinking, thinking of him—her darling—lying under those cold, hollow waves, tossing restlessly to and fro with the sweep of the surges, entangled in long, snaky coils of seaweed, with no rest—no rest. A passionate yearning to be at rest too, a strange, weird longing to be drowned also, came over her night after night, till she would rouse herself with a quick shudder, and lie down to sleep, but would remain awake for hours—thinking, thinking—and would at last become insensible from exhaustion, with his name on her lips. Morning after morning she would rise with that strange blank feeling at her heart, and then go to her father's room, and sit through the long dull day. She thought then nothing could ever give back to her the light and bloom of her life. Every morning, sunshine or shower, would bring Reuben to inquire, and she would go down and speak to him. Now and then he would go up and look at the sick man, take his hand and hold it gently, meet those earnest questioning eyes (which every succeeding time seemed more earnest, more questioning), and then ride away again. He never stayed more than a few minutes, he never said more than a few quiet words, but Marjorie grew to rely on his coming, and trust to him for anything she wanted.

The intense cold had passed away for some weeks. A few of those early, treacherous, but most lovely spring days came on and passed away, and every day Reuben asked, "Has he spoken?" and heard the answer, "No."

CHAPTER V.

STILL ALONE.

It was a lovely night. The moon rose radiant like a silver cup in the sky, and far away on the moor the cloud shadows floated softly. The wind sighed faintly to itself, like a soft hand touching a silver harp—not a sound, save its gentle rhythm. Marjorie leaned up against the casement with her pale face turned up, unearthly in the radiance, so sad, so unutterably mournful. She was thinking, and the tears were swelling in her eyes, though she was unaware of it.

"Marjorie!"

She turned quickly. Her father had raised himself, and was looking at her; he held out one arm, and with a cry she ran up to him—he twined it round her, and she threw both hers round him.

"My darling! I know all."

He felt her leaning heavily against him, but she did not cry, only her heart beat violently.

"Since when?" she whispered.

"The night I was taken ill. They talked, thinking me insensible. I heard all, my darling—my poor darling!"

She felt a quick globular action in her throat, but held back the sobs.

"Oh! father, I loved him so!"

What simple words! but the world of crushed anguish and life-long misery in them only one who loved her could divine. He made no reply, and she lay on his breast in silence. Presently she said:

"Father, you will get better?"

"Am I not so?" he asked, evasively. Yet he knew, so saying, that he would never get well again; but one glance at Marjorie showed him she did not divine the truth. He kissed her, and then they remained silent; he thinking about her and her future with an anxiety so intense as seriously to injure him; he could only see one opening for her, and that—well, what would she say to it?

Lying there as he had done for so many weeks, with nothing but her, his darling, to think of, how could he have failed to see and understand the deep, sincere love with which Reuben Yool worshiped her? He had not failed to see and understand, and he also saw the trust and esteem she had for him; but with her heart aching and bleeding, how could he think of any thing further? It was not possible. So he had lain day after day, and night after night, knowing that, as surely as each day rose and each night fell, the waters of death were welling deeper and deeper around him, and she was nearer being left alone—alone in this great, weary, desolate world, with no one to care how she lived or died. The anguish told on him, weakening him bodily and mentally.

Day after day he watched earnestly the grave, honest face of Reuben; it never altered, never changed. Here was a man to be relied on; one to whom he could leave his child with confidence. He had not known him for five years in vain; he knew him—upright, honorable, and good; but he also knew that, as things stood, he would never speak. He saw that Reuben was quite hopeless, and though his heart ached to death, would maintain silence.

Mr. Fleming, though he sorrowed truly for the death of his only nephew, the affianced husband of Marjorie, still, being as it were beyond this life already, saw with "larger other eyes." He beheld first Marjorie alone, utterly desolate, mourning for a lost shadow; weary in the evening, weary in the morning, with no one to love her or care for her. Then he saw her again—sad, it is true, and still and grave—but the wife of a good and noble man; cared for, watched, and tendered; nay, worshipped. Gradually growing stronger, quieter, and happier; safe in the protecting love and home of her husband; and he knew this would be best, even though at first this seemed heartless. He felt assured that no one living with Reuben could fail to become better, stronger, and finally grow to love him. No woman, certainly, whom he loved, and had chosen as his wife.

To-night, weak with his effort at speaking, and feeling more strongly than ever the hold that death had on him, the whole case seemed more distinct than before, and lying back with her hand in his and his eyes fixed on her face, he prayed fervently that it might be as he wished, and that he might live to know her Reuben Yool's wife. He longed for her to be comforted and cherished, and to grow into peace and rest.

CHAPTER VI.

SPRINGTIDE.

SOME months had passed away. Mr. Fleming had risen from his bed, and, propped up in a chair, sat by the open window. Weak and white as a child, he sat there, leaning back, and gasping slowly and painfully for breath, with his thin transparent fingers clasping the arms of his chair, and his brow damp with the fatigue and pain of coughing. His pillow, his face, and his hands were all of one hue, save for one brilliant spot on either cheek, and the dark blue hollow around each eye.

Now and then he tried to raise himself and look out of the window, but was too weak, so

only sank back again, while a wan smile came over his face on hearing Marjorie's voice, saying in a pleased tone, "Oh! thank you so much!"

Looking at him lying there, one could not but marvel at the intense power of a human soul over such a frail body, for this man was living by sheer force of will; held back to this earth, weak and full of anguish as he was, by the intense love he bore his child, by the determination of seeing her Reuben Yool's wife. Though each breath he drew was long and husky, and full of agony to him; though he rarely ever slept two hours consecutively; though his cough wrung his every limb with anguish; he lived, and would live—willed it with that intense, concentrated power that holds body and soul together; willed it with every such breath and every such gasp and cough.

The bright sunshine poured in at the casement; the soft air played on his face; a thousand sweet and balmy odors filled the room; and outside in the orchard light and shade played hide-and-seek between the fruit-trees; the merry gnats whirled up and down; the sparrows and a pair of blackbirds sang in the branches; the hens and chickens pecked and walked and ran in and out; pussy basked on the steps or walked demurely down the flagged pathway, and the moors lay emerald and amber in the sunlight, with the pools and tarns shining in the blaze. A pair of larks flew trilling past, chasing each other in and out; and far, far away, the blue hills lay hazy and faint. It was such a delicious, soft day, one longed to go out and wander at will over the broad down, with its bells of thyme and heather, its flocks of gorse and bracken. To paddle with naked feet in the tiny burn that rushed and warbled with an under-song past the wicket-gate, to snatch at the moss on the rocks and boulders that impeded its course; or to chase the bees humming around the hive in the sheltered corner by the laurels; to watch the insects floating so gracefully on the water in the rain-butt; to go and press to one's lip the odorous buds of the apple and pear trees just unsheathing their beauties; to throw one's self down idly in a corner of the old orchard by the wood and peat stack, and, flinging one's arms to form a shelter for one's eyes, gaze out and away at the white fleecy clouds sailing along, and dream sweet dreams of a better spring.

The sick man was thus thinking his thoughts, when a delicious fragrance close to him made him turn his vision nearer earth; a bunch of primroses and harebells was pressed to his face, and looking up, he saw Marjorie bending over him. Marjorie in her dark dress, with her blue eyes and fair hair glinting in the sunlight, looking so gentle and so loving.

"Reuben brought them," she said. "He thought you would like them. They are the first he could get."

She brought in an old mug and filled it with them, placing it on the broad sill by his side with a smile. "One or two you shall have all to yourself," she said, and placed a few of the delicate, faintly-tinted buds on his white hands.

"How good of Reuben," said the sick man.

"Yes, he is always so thoughtful," she answered, and then her face became very grave, and she turned away, while her father looked at her wistfully.

The past months had wrought a great change in him, and Marjorie knew now that indeed he had very, very nearly passed from her; so nearly, indeed, that it became a matter of painful watching. She was changed too—far quieter and sadder than before. The great blank in her life had settled down on her and pressed her back, as it were. The eager, happy look that had always met one with such startling brightness had passed away forever, leaving a mournful, quiet look of care and watchfulness in its place.

Marjorie was not one of those morbid natures that go on bemoaning outwardly forever a loss in their daily life. She rarely, if ever, shed

tears now at the thought of the poor dead sailor; but day by day, and night by night, her one thought was, first her father, then her dead lover; and though she never even mentioned his name now, his image was as near her heart, and as bright in its nearness, as it had been the day he had sailed, nearly three years before. She could go about her usual duties; she could speak cheerfully to Katie; caress her father; eat, drink, and sleep as usual, without fretful or repining tears; enjoy the spring air, the bright sun, the budding flowers; and then, when at rest at night, when all her work was done, could read that short verse over and over again, lift the spray to her lips, and lie back to sleep with the button close clasped in her hand, without a moan or tear. Marjorie was as faithful to the dead as ever she had been to the living, although she spoke less about it perhaps. Meanwhile she had known long ago that Reuben Yool loved her and what her father wished, though never one word had passed their lips or hers; and she was learning to think of it as it would be—a sacred duty and trust.

Reuben came every other day, as he had done since her father's illness, but he never spoke one word of love or admiration. Did he not know all her love and all her sorrow? Yet this very bar in his way was the strongest connecting link between them—and he felt this.

"Why did not Reuben come in to-day?" asked her father, after silently watching her for some time plying her needle in silence.

"He has so much to do at the farm that he went back at once," answered Marjorie.

"It is nice to see a new face now and again, and hear a little news," said Mr. Fleming, half fretfully.

"Next time he comes he shall come in, father."

Accordingly a few days later he did so. The sick man took his hand eagerly.

"I am so glad to see you again. Do always come in when you can," he said. "Can you stop and talk now?"

Reuben was very busy, but he did not refuse to stay and while away a few short minutes with him. It was a pleasant little chamber, and, besides, how could he be more pleasantly employed than in watching Marjorie as she went in and out?

"She is so good to me—no words can tell how good she is to me," said Mr. Fleming, wistfully looking at the grave, honest face, and nervously holding the broad hand that lay passive on his knee. "You can't know how good and gentle she is," he added, jealously, as it were.

"No one would doubt it," answered Reuben, quietly, seeing that the father waited for an assent.

Marjorie came back at that instant, and her father called to her. She came up.

"Give me your hand," he said, feverishly. She did so. "Small and white, strong and gentle," and he gave it a loving touch.

Marjorie colored faintly, and signed to Reuben that he had better go.

"You are getting tired, dear father," she said. "Reuben will come again soon."

"Yes, yes—very soon." Then as the yeoman turned to go, he caught his hand once more, and whispered, looking at Marjorie, "We are not proud."

She did not hear what he said, but she did see the hot flush on Reuben's brow, and going to the wicket-gate with him, said gravely,

"I do not think my father is quite himself to-day."

Hope, which had dyed his brow, sank down at her quiet, constrained tone, and he merely answered:

"If he is worse, you will send Katie"—

"Or come myself."

"No—do not." He said it so earnestly that it was her turn to flush and feel uncomfortable. "I have a good reason for saying this," he said, and then rode away, leaving Marjorie in a maze, and determined not to allow him to see her father again.

She stood for a few seconds, allowing the

wind to ruffle back her hair from the confines of the broad black snood, and then went in with a heavy heart.

Her father looked up sharply. "Well?" he said.

"Well, dear father, he will come again soon."

"Soon—soon—aye, soon!" muttered the sick man. "Marjie"—she came and knelt by him—"Marjie, it must be soon—very soon—I want to be at rest, my bird, and that will be soon."

She clasped her hands tightly together to keep back a choking sob. Oh! why must she be hurried on like this? Give her time! give her time! was the cry of her revolted heart.

"Father, you are better than you were," she said, cheerfully. "Come, let me shake up your pillows;" and she beat them up. He looked at her wearily, and sank back; and she went up to her little room, and after a short time of aimless wandering up and down to regain composure, came down again quiet and calm as ever. Her father had fallen asleep, and she sat and worked in silence, with many longing thoughts about the great ocean and its burden.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BETTER SPRING.

MR. FLEMING lingered on until the end of the summer, but from that day he never was quite himself. I do not wish to make my story wearisome, so will pass over the intervening weeks, and bring you to a late, soft, balmy evening, when nature is so lulled and soothed that all things rest, and there is a universal calm and hush, as though all things awaited some decision from above. Mr. Fleming lay, or rather sat up in bed, gasping faintly. The lattice was wide open, but there was no breeze to enter. Marjorie stood by it as though listening or watching with a strange mingling of expressions on her colorless face.

Presently there was the click of a latch down stairs, and the sick man moved sharply.

"Is he come?" he asked, faintly.

"Yes," she answered; and then as the door opened, and Reuben entered, a look of repulsion well-nigh rose in all her features.

He came up to Mr. Fleming, and bent over him. He saw that he was very ill.

"Marjorie"—she had been going toward the door, but stopped now, white and shivering; her father stretched out his hand; she came up to him, and then he said, solemnly, "you have promised"—

"Yes."

"God bless you, my best one! Kiss me."

She did so gently, and he put both his hands on her head. Then she rose erect again, looked almost defiantly at Reuben, and went down. He obeyed Mr. Fleming's motion, and knelt down by the bed. For a few seconds there was silence, save for the intense effort with which the sick man drew each breath; it was nearly gone—very nearly—and only fluttered feebly between the dry lips. His fingers wandered over the sheets in the same aimless way that Reuben remembered months before.

"Reuben, I am dying fast—fast!" he gasped, painfully, and his breath came slower and slower.

"You are indeed very ill, sir."

Then a pause, then he drew those two strong sinewy hands in his hot ones, and said:

"Reuben, you love Marjorie."

The blood flew over the brown, honest face, and he turned partially away.

"Yes," he answered.

This was no time for false evasion, and Reuben felt it.

"Ask her to be your wife?"

The breath fluttered awfully; faster and faster. The fingers relaxed their hold, feeble as it had been.

"Sir, she does not love me!"

(Oh! most bitter confession.)

"No, but she will. Give her time; she is young, she is good, she is true, she is pure, she is

worth winning, Reuben, though it is her father who tells you so."

"I never doubted it," answered the other, hoarsely; "she is too good for me. Sir, sir, think. How can I ask her—you so ill, and she with her heart still aching?" And the strong man bowed his head and almost sobbed.

"Yet you love her, Reuben?"

"Aye, God knows I do."

"Then ask her—go straight down now and ask her." The brilliant eyes blazed up again, the breath came quicker and quicker. "Reuben," and the voice was, oh! so faint and low, "go down and ask her, and I will wait for that; you must not linger—go."

"Sir, it seems to me so shocking," urged the yeoman.

"Listen," said Mr. Fleming. "I am dying—would I tell you to do anything that is wrong, think you, by my own child?—go."

Reuben rose and went down, and Katie coming up sat by the open window and listened to a blackbird trilling close to her. There was a smile on the dying man's face, and the fluttering breath came more feebly than ever. Down below in the parlor stood Marjorie and Reuben, she drawn to her full height, pale as death, cold, stern, apparently inflexible; he alternately white and red, with his hands clasped involuntarily; determined, yet imploring. The parlor was nearly in darkness; but more distinct, more heavy, more chill than ever lay the shrouding shadow on the floor, though neither of them remarked it. Marjorie spoke first.

"Well, Reuben, you say you wish to speak to me—we are alone."

He drew a deep breath.

"Miss Marjorie, I am a simple, uneducated yeoman, and I do not know how to say what I wish to say, only I know I feel it and mean it from the very depth of my heart—will you be my wife?" He was extremely pale now and trembling like a child. Marjorie had thought she could answer him quite simply, truly, and to the point; but this agitated, passionate man utterly routed all ideas she had had; she sat down suddenly, for she felt as if all things were whirling around her, but he remained standing, waiting for an answer. She tried to speak, but words failed and vanished on her tongue, and he spoke again: "Miss Marjorie, I do not ask you as another might. I know all, as you know too. I know you do not love me—how can you? I do not ask it, but I love you truly and well. I will try and make you a good husband, if you will put up with a simple yeoman like me, if you will try and allow me to be blessed with you in my home; and one thing, I think you know how pleased he would be, only I would not wish to have you on those terms," he ended proudly.

Marjorie made a quick, upward movement with her hands, as though warding off something, and would have spoken if she could, for she felt for the man, and the simple, truthful, earnest pleading touched her.

"I am afraid you think me cruel and heartless," he said, sorrowfully; still she made no answer, and he, carried away, as he had been, by the most passionate feeling of his life, now stood utterly abashed before her; still she did not speak; so he turned away, and went and stood by the window in silence, in a perfect agony of doubt and longing; up stairs the sick man coughed feebly, and between them lay the threatening shadow. Marjorie's face became a perfect tempest of feeling the instant she was unobserved. One wild thought rose of the single word that had told her all only three years before (a thought crushed down and out instantly), sending the blood back to her heart in wild waves, and leaving her very lips white with the effort. Twice she motioned toward him with her hands, before she could utter:

"Reuben"—he came back instantly—"Reuben, I respect and esteem you, but"—her voice choked and her face sank in her hands; he stood shaking all over; she looked up again—but I do not love you. I feel that this is no time for anything but truth; you have been so true and gentle with me, I will try to be the same to you. Oh, Reuben, you deserve all

things from the woman who could be your wife, and I cannot give them you—my heart died last autumn."

She choked again. As she grew more agitated, he became graver and calmer.

"Miss Marjorie, I do not wish to distress you," he said, hoarsely: I love you so well, I could not bear to do so, but if—if—I do not ask you to love me, simply to be my wife, and—and—to hope"—He held out to her his strong broad hand. "You may not trust me, yet I have loved you for eight years, and I know I shall never change. You are the only woman I ever could love."

Looking at him as he stood there before her, no one would have dared to doubt him, nor did she.

"I can never repay you all you have done for me and mine," she said, faintly, "yet I will try;" and she put both her hands in his, and he held them, and, bending down, kissed them. Then, without another word, guessing how she must be longing to be alone, he left her and went up to her father, and, sitting by him, told him she had consented, with such a thrill in his voice and such a light in his eyes that the dying man smiled more gladly than ever, and, settling back in his pillows, said only, "Thank God!" and then lay quiet a little.

Once or twice Reuben wondered how Marjorie was, and what she was doing; but the sick man held his hand, and now and then murmured, "Rest," and he would not disturb him, but sat still with his happy thoughts.

Marjorie was doing nothing; she sat quite quiet, as he had left her, with a stunned expression on her face, striving so hard not to think that all things whirled in and out of her mind in an eerie and fearful dance. A voice moaned in her ears, like the echo of a wave—"Marjorie! Marjorie!" A tall shadow stood up before her and held out its arms to her imploringly; a faint murmur came mockingly toward her, "Dead?" and her thought answered it, "Yes, long ago!"

She sat gazing dimly into futurity and thinking over the past—the past, so beautiful, so mournful, so past indeed to her for evermore; she felt that she had severed herself from it forever now, and that it must be buried to her. She imagined herself untrue to him, the generous, trusting, loving yeoman; and she imagined herself untrue to the poor dead sailor, and yet she was not untrue to either. For she still loved the shadow, and but placed trust in the living, and had she not told him so? Yet we, living, fear the dead so little.

Later, she went up to her father's room and found Reuben still there. The blackbird had ceased his trill long ago; the last faint vesper light lay soft across the bed, a soft breeze stirred the branches outside in a rhythmical cadence, and throughout the room was a quiet hush, almost perceptible.

Reuben stood up as she entered, and motioned to her that her father slept; she came up softly and stood by him, looking down at the quiet sleeper, bent to kiss his brow, so white and transparent, started, and uttered a wild cry, "Reuben, my father!" Reuben bent down quickly; Mr. Fleming slept indeed—he had passed into the "Better Spring."

"Without one word to me. Oh! my father, my father!"

Reuben drew her toward him gently, and, supporting her with his strong arm, said, "Be comforted, you have given him rest!" He said it very solemnly; but Marjorie only broke into passionate tears, and said:

"Yes! and I am utterly alone. Oh! father, father!"

BOOK III.—YOOŁ FARM.

CHAPTER I.

YOOŁ FARM.

A DULL day—mid-day—three horses stop at Yool Farm; a man jumps down and opens the little wicket-gate, then goes back, lifts a young woman off a gray horse, takes her hand and leads her round by the garden to the cloisters.

"Welcome home, Marjorie," he says, and, without an answer, she just looks up at him with a quiet smile, which he is far too proud and happy to see is forced.

Marjorie Fleming has been married to Reuben Yool that morning, and he has brought his wife home.

Looking down at her walking by his side, he can scarcely believe it true. That the dream of his life should be realized seems so utterly improbable. Truly, he had served long for her; she had been hardly won, and Reuben was a man who valued to the full what was hard to win, and worth the winning; nor was Reuben one of those who care to win anything simply because it is difficult of attainment; he generally, perhaps, rather undervalued a thing till in full possession of it.

Robin was leading round the horses, and Reuben, lifting the heavy iron latch of the porch-door, proceeded to throw it open. The house was peculiar in the way of its construction, and was not unlike a capital T; the flower-garden lying at the foot, the porch and cloisters lying along one side, and the living-rooms running along the top. They entered and stood in a large stone hall (with a wide stone staircase running up one side on the right), divided across the middle by great oaken gates, through the bars of which Marjorie saw a long vista of stone corridor lighted by small windows, and looking gloomy and damp. Reuben threw open a door to the left and said, "This is the dining-hall; we call it Refectory, I believe as it was called in the monks' time."

They stood now in a long, low, vaulted room, devoid of furniture except two narrow tables, like oblong boxes, standing on either side of the chamber, and reaching from the door to the fire-place, which was opposite the entrance. Tall, narrow windows lighted the room all down one side—the other was a blank wall, with a dead and unbroken surface; on one side you sat between the table and the wall; on the other, between the table and the windows, so that all faced the same way, inward. The tables had no legs, but stood like hollow boxes on their sides, or, as it struck Marjorie, like coffins, for they were very old, of black wood, and stained with damp. A fire burned in the enormous fire-place; over it was a strange old fresco—a man in an Eastern dress walking in a garden, all the flowers bending before him as he walked.

"I believe it is intended to represent our Saviour in the Garden of Paradise," said Reuben; "but he goes by the name of Phenuel among the laborers—why, I do not know."

He did not tell her of the superstition regarding the room and fresco. A sudden sunbeam lit up the painting, and the colors gleamed out in wondrous beauty.

"It is a wonderful old painting," said Marjorie; "and the face is full of beauty and gentleness."

They stood looking at it a little longer, then went out again—through the oaken gates, down some shallow stone steps, and then Reuben threw open a door and said,

"This will be your room, Marjorie."

She looked forward. The room was octagonal in form, and all sides but two were windows—lattices in mullions. The furniture was very, very old oak or ebony carved; chairs and tables with spindle legs. A few books lay on the table, a vase of flowers stood on a tiny bracket by a huge old arm-chair, a fire burned brightly in the grate, large crimson cushions filled the window-seats, and some empty flower-pots stood by them—such a strange mixture of comfort and desolation.

Marjorie turned to thank Reuben, for she knew he had done his best, when something moved: and it was with a sudden thrill of something closely akin to terror that she beheld a little creature in black gazing up at her—a little, old, old woman, in a tight black dress, and a huge white cap, and black mittens, and a white apron; and such a cadaverous face, with great spectacles, and a large mouth with two cruel-looking projecting teeth. The weird little woman popped from somewhere, and dipped her a low courtesy.

"Ah, the new lady—fine lady. Good-day."

"Good-day, madam," stammered Marjorie, remembering dimly that she had heard tell of this being—Reuben's grandmother, or, at any rate, some relation.

"It's rather cold, I think," said the little woman again. "It's often cold here—it's the cold and damp of the grave and charnel-house. Birds don't pipe in the cold weather." The tone, the emphasis, the words were horrible. Marjorie stepped back against her husband, and clung to his arm.

"If I had a bird with a broken wing,
I know, you know, it would not sing.
If I had a girl with a broken heart,
The sooner we die, the sooner apart."

White face, dark eyes, fair hair—food for worms."

Reuben spoke sharply: "Dame, this is not your room!"

"Yet it was." Her tone altered. She evidently feared him slightly.

"Go!" he said, waving his hand toward the door.

"Well, good-by, lady—no graves so wet as those under water!" And, with a hideous leer, she popped out as she had popped in.

Marjorie's face was white with intense fear, and Reuben sat her down in the arm-chair, and was silent a while. Then he said gently:

"I ought to have prepared you, Marjorie, but I did not think she would have been in here. She is quite silly and quite harmless; sometimes she is quieter than at others. Only treat her calmly and without fear—she will do you no harm. If she were to"—His eyes dilated, and then he went on more quietly. "But she is a perfect baby—she only talks, never acts."

"But Reuben, she won't come in here?" pleaded Marjorie. "Indeed" (with a quick shudder), "I could not bear it."

"No, indeed," he answered; "she never shall. I wish I could send her away; but I can't, Marjorie."

"Is she your grandmother, Reuben?"

"No," he said, quickly and gravely; "no relation, really. I cannot tell you the story; it is very horrible. I am bound to have her here. Poor soul—poor soul!" He went away to the window for a second or two; and Marjorie wondered what it could mean; she knew it was very dreadful to have the old woman there. Presently he came back, and said cheerfully, "Now we will go and see Katie."

They went out again, and he called. Katie came quickly, and for the first time Marjorie's face lit up. How glad and thankful she was to see an old face. Then they went up-stairs into the gable-room, from whose windows Reuben had so often and so sadly watched. He told her all about it now, and she stood passively by and heard it, and thought of the little cottage where she had been so happy.

This was to be their room, he said; and she looked round curiously on the oak-paneled walls and floor, on the great bed with its carvings and hangings, on the ivy clustering round the window, on the branches of the fir-trees bending in so sombre and dark—all was sombre. The sun had gone in again, and the gloaming was coming on quickly. He went down to look after the men, and she sat a lonely figure at the open window, with her fair head leaning back against the wall, and a far-away look in her eyes. Only a month—could it be? Her father rested in the lonely moorland cemetery twenty miles away, the dell cottage was close and desolate, and she was the wife of Reuben Yool, and mistress of Yool Farm. In marrying Reuben she had severed herself totally from her past life—from the sunlight and gladness. Here all would be quiet, solemn, sombre; she knew it, and felt it. As the sky had darkened in the west, so her life had darkened, and would darken yet more. Yet she would try and be a good and true wife to him who had chosen her; she would do her best to please him in all ways.

Sitting looking first round the quaint old room, and then out far, far away over the moor-

land and beyond the setting sun, she knew this was the room she would like best in the whole house. The ivy rustling round the window reminded her of her room at the cottage, and she caught a distant gleam of the tarn that lay near the east end of her old home. Then rapidly she thought of the time when it might have been the happy home of her wedded love, had he come back rich—as he had hoped; and the wild, restless longing surged up in her heart sickeningly; but she would not give way to it, so rose and went down again without one backward look.

CHAPTER II.

PHENUEL.

THE life that began on the following morning was totally different from anything to which Marjorie had been accustomed. Reuben rose very early and went out, but for sometime she lay pondering on her future, with the sun glinting in and dappling the old oak floor; half dreamily, half wonderingly, she watched it till a great bell rang, and then she too got up and went down.

Katie, who was standing at the bottom of the great oak stairs, thought how sweet she looked, stepping down them, with the light from the cloisters streaming upon her, in her black dress and white neckerchief with its dainty muslin folds pinned—no, knotted across her chest—and her hair held back soberly by its black band; her head, the shape of it at least, was her great beauty, it was so exquisitely formed and placed on her shoulders.

Robin, who was chopping wood in the court, saw her too, and growled to himself, "Eugh!"

She went into her room of the preceding day. The windows were wide open, and a large bunch of early spring flowers lay on the octagon table. She smelt them with delight, and called Katie to bring water and mugs, then stepped to the window and looked at the garden.

It was a curious old place, with low walls on three sides—they had been built partially of portions of the old priory—here and there grotesque carvings, lovely arabesques, twisted scrolls, and in one part two heads peeped out of the rank ivy and mosses; sunflowers, gilly-flowers, bachelor's-buttons, sweet-williams, marigolds, hollyhocks, columbines, tiger-lilies flourished there in the season; at present, periwinkles, snow-drops, primroses, and a few other plants peeped up. Marjorie's quick eye took in the beauty that might be made of the place, and planned walks and seats in many holes and corners.

Katie brought the water, and while she puts the flowers in two curious old china bowls, Marjorie looked round the room more carefully than she had done the preceding night. The two sides not formed by windows were one over the fire-place, and the other was filled by a most wonderful old cabinet, black as night, but covered with arabesques in some metal nearly as dark as the wood with age and neglect. Marjorie went up to it and looked at it. The wood, on her rubbing it, emitted a faint fragrance, but not of sandal wood; she did not know what it was. She now perceived that the cabinet was fixed into the wall and went much farther back than she had at first imagined. "How delightful!" she thought; "I will rub it up the first wet day and look at all its treasures and drawers."

"Marjorie!"

It was Reuben calling her, and she hurried out; he took her hand and led her without any explanation to the Refectory, threw open the door, and standing on the threshold, said, "I have brought you my wife."

Marjorie flushed crimson; she was standing before about twenty men seated at the two long tables; they all rose, and one came forward and said, "You are welcome, mistress;" then they all turned round and bowed to the fresco, to Marjorie's amazement. Reuben did the same,

smiling, and touched her, as though he expected her to do likewise. But she was too much astonished.

"You must do it," he whispered. "I will tell you why afterwards." So she made a grave courtesy, and her husband took her out again back to the octagon room. "Now come and sit here, and I will tell you." So he drew her on to the middle window-seat. "I told you that all my people call it 'Phenuel.' There is a silly superstition about it. They say it moves!" Marjorie started. "Don't believe it," he went on quickly. "I have lived here from a boy, and never saw it; but they say when any misfortune is going to happen that lights burn in the room all night, and it comes down and walks; so whenever any new soul comes to live here, they all try to propitiate it in every way."

"How very heathenish," said Marjorie, with an uncomfortable feeling.

"I knew you ought to have bowed to it yesterday when you came in for the first time, but truth is, I feared to alarm you. It seems old Robin watched us, and saw you did not do so, and I fear he will never forgive you for it. I told him it was all my fault; but he said, 'She ought to ha' done it,' as if you could know without being told. However, I judged it wiser for you to do so to-day."

He did not tell her that Robin had sat up all night in the cloisters, and swore he saw lights burning all down the room; he knew how drear and somber the old house must seem to her, and did not wish to alarm her or make her timid. All that day she was busy arranging her two rooms, for her few earthly goods had been brought over from the cottage some days before. The parrot, shells, and feather fans went over the great shelving mantelpiece, the Cordova cushion into the huge arm-chair, her few books along the cabinet. She turned out the empty flower-pots, and, fetching some old china bowls and cups, filled them with moss and ivy from the garden, with stars of the periwinkle and yellow jasmine in them. They looked very pretty. Then she stirred up the fire, and went off to the kitchen and fetched Pussy, who had migrated to the farm.

"Live here," she said, kissing her soft head and popping her down in the arm-chair. "You dear, dear, poor Pussy!" Whereupon the cat purred and looked comfortable. All that day she saw nothing of the old lady. Katie said she was out; at any rate she left Marjorie in peace, though she was haunted with the fear of coming upon her round corners and steps.

Reuben was away all day, and Marjorie took a tour of inspection all by herself. What a wonderful old place it was! all nooks and corners, and doors and windows where there ought to have been none, blank walls, steps up, steps down, steps here, there, everywhere, gables, turrets, a queer old tower covered with ivy, with birds building in it, and a vane creaking to and fro, deep cavernous looking loopholes, going down, nobody knew where. From the very bowels of the earth she heard whistling, and, seeing some broken steps, thought of going down, but did not, luckily, as it was a sort of dungeon in which were stored potatoes, wood, peat, apples, plums, sheep-skins, sand—what not, in fact? Climbing carefully over some fragments of old carvings, and clearing a moss-grown seat with a spring, she alighted in a court, and was greeted by the most tremendous hubbub of dogs' voices. In an instant flashed on her the recollection of that first day, when she had come to Reuben for aid in her father's illness. Being minded to crush back forever the past memories which would keep cropping up in this Hamlet-ghost-like way, she went bravely into a kind of barn-like place, and faced the dogs. The noise!

A number of dogs of all degrees and kinds rushed out of their respective huts, and barked furiously, held back by chains though. She looked round curiously, and gave a shrewd guess that once at least this falling house must have been part of the chapel. Through great rents in the shaky roof came flakes of sunlight, lying on the grotesquely paved floor (tessellated in parts) in large quivering globes of flame.

The dust motes danced in the light, and the shadow looked cool and soft. Great casks and cases lay about, and in spite of the many dogs living there the air was sweet and smelt only of hay. Two tiny pointer pups ran toward her, and "made friends" very quickly. But wishing to explore still farther, she put them away, and went on through a large court, lying in sullen, dank stillness and shadow, that made her shiver, and then out again close to the cloisters.

Robin ceased his whistling, seeing her, as he emerged from some dark, underground place, with piled-up wood on his back, and only scowled angrily at her greeting; so she went on again, past a tall wall with a window in it, all in ruins. She peeped through: on the other side, a tangled growth of briars and ivy, dank and damp. Back she came to the front garden, went over it thoroughly, climbed on to a mass of fallen masonry, and gazed far away down and up, and down and up, over the moors; went up to Bruin, spoke to him and patted him, but he growled, and she left him again very quickly; passed Robin, chopping wood—this time in silence—and went in.

As she entered, the chill and silence of the house fell on her, and the half-smile on her face died out instantaneously. She went into the Refectory, and walked up to the fresco. It was cracked right across, doubtless by the heat of the fire; in some parts the painting had faded nearly to extinction, in others the colors appeared as vivid as though only recently painted. The face was very beautiful—so gentle and loving; and she smiled when she thought of its working evil to any one. A sudden shadow made her look up. Robin regarded her through the window. She shook her head at him playfully, and he went away. She noticed a great cupboard in one corner, and that and the tables and benches were the only furniture in the room. The fire-irons were chained to the wall.

She left the room and went up-stairs. All the rooms were dark, low, somber-looking—at least of those she looked at. Into the head part of the T, as it were, she did not go, as she knew the old lady lived there, and she was really afraid to meet her. Coming down again, the great oaken gates interested her. She wondered why they had been placed there. Reuben told her afterward that there had been one on the staircase in former days, and in pulling it down they had discovered an inner staircase running parallel the whole way, in the thickness of the wall—for what purpose they did not know. When she went back to her room she thought it looked less desolate. Pussy had curled herself up to sleep, the sun streamed in, and the feather fans glittered in the light. It was a strange-looking room, but no longer so weird-looking.

She sat down to work, and Katie came and kept her company. Katie thought it "awful lonesome," but would not have told Marjorie so for anything. In the course of a day or two, they rubbed up the cabinet. It was inlaid with silver, and must be of great value, Marjorie thought. She asked Reuben where it came from, but he did not know. He asked the Dame, but she only grinned at him viciously and made no answer. Marjorie hunted all over it, in all the nooks and crannies—half expecting to find some clue to its history—but found nothing except some old shells and a few love-letters, which she burned, from an "Edward Yool" to a "Rebecca Stone"—Reuben's grandfather and grandmother. So she dusted it out, and put in a few things of her own, shut the doors, and thought no more about it. Not so the old Dame. The next time Marjorie went out of the room, she popped in, chased the cat out, and went peering about the cabinet. Marjorie came in suddenly and caught her. Now, be it known, Marjorie feared this old woman exceedingly, and she knew it.

"A-r-r-r-r-r!—get away!—get away!" she cried, setting up her old back—for all the world like a black cat—and making her eyes dilate and contract with marvelous rapidity. "Get away!—get away!"

In all probability Marjorie would have obeyed on any other occasion; but the Dame had her hands on the door, behind which lay Marjorie's chief treasure in the whole wide world—Edward's last letter. To think that that creature should touch it was horrible. Marjorie trembled, but advanced.

"You must not touch my things," she said, gently.

"A-r-r-r-r-r!" (impossible to express the sort of grating sound she made). "Your things? Fie! fie! fie!—my things? my things! You shan't see what I was like before the worms began. The worms crawl in and out!"

Marjorie was dreadfully frightened, and stood still, wordless, and the old Dame undid the door. In the next instant the letter was in her hands; but this was not to be borne. Marjorie rushed forward, and, seizing the letter, shook off the old woman, banged the door, and stood against it—trembling, but thoroughly roused.

"How dare you!" she said. "Go! this is not your room!"

The Dame gathered herself together, shook out her apron, launched a vindictive look at Marjorie, clawed at her once or twice across the room, and went; but from that hour Marjorie felt that an evil spirit was evoked, as it were, which never rested, never tired—which dogged her and pursued her night and day. She rarely met the Dame again face to face; but at night, going up to bed, she was dogged by a shadow.

In the dead of night there would come an eerie hissing and scratching at her door; she knew who was there. Reuben wondered why she bolted it so carefully night after night; he, worn out and tired, would sleep soundly and never hear the sounds which broke Marjorie's sleep, as she would lie awake and listen and think, and shrink, and wonder—growing cold with the thought—if there could be a secret entrance to the room of which she was unaware; it was horrible, but had to be borne in silence.

One awful night, when the wind was howling over the waste and thundering in the chimney, when in that old, old house strange feet and voices seemed making an unholy clatter, a voice said distinctly, "Dead! Dead! Dead!" Marjorie lay white and silent. Then it came again, "Dead!—Broken faith!—curst! curst! curst!" and died away in an inaudible mutter. She clasped her hands and began praying, for something unholy and evil it must be to be abroad at such a time on such a night. A long pause, and then, "Marjorie! Marjorie! Marjorie! I am so cold—so cold!" Marjorie seized Reuben's arm and awoke him, her teeth chattering in her head; she placed her hand on his mouth and whispered, "Listen." Again it came, mournful and low, "Marjorie! Marjorie!" Reuben put one arm round her, and he heard it distinctly; then lifting a heavy stick that always lay by his bedside, he hurled it at the door; it fell with a tremendous noise. The dogs howled outside, and then dead silence. For nights and nights after that there was peace.

Reuben and Marjorie both knew by whom this was done, but they neither of them spoke of it to the other.

Marjorie had told her husband of the encounter with the Dame about the cabinet, and he counseled her to keep clear of her in future; in his own mind he pondered and pondered how he might mend matters, but could think of no way.

CHAPTER III.

HOW MARJORIE TRIED NOT TO BE A LADY.

SOME months had passed. Marjorie led a very quiet, lonely life; she was almost always alone, for Reuben was away all day long; but she was not unhappy. She had quickly made friends; every morning she went down and gave the men their breakfast. Reuben had not wished this, but, on being questioned, confessed his mother had always done so, and Marjorie immediately insisted. She poured out the ale, and cut the joints of meat and the bread and cheese, and poured out the porridge; the men, a rough, wild, but not unkindly lot, grew to look for the sweet,

gentle face, and greeted her with a hearty "Good-day," and rather lingered than not over their early meals. Now and then they would bring, one and another, as they found out she cared for such things, one a rare plant from some lonely fen, one a rare egg or two; once a whole nest of young grouse were brought her, and she reared them successfully. She always received these gifts with such pleasure, and such gentle, loving words, that I believe the men would have done anything for her.

At this time she had two lambs with broken legs; a pet lark with a broken wing; a jackdaw, and numberless fowls and dogs—all things loved her. She had even succeeded in bringing round Bruin, and he would stalk majestically after her, carefully avoiding the tiny chickens when "they," i. e., he and his mistress, were feeding the fowls; he would follow her into the house, and even lie down before the fire in the octagon room—but this was only occasional, as his big body was apt to get in the way, and his big tail commit dreadful mischief when waved in the ecstasy of affection. Puss having protested against his first entrance by bouncing straight through the window, gradually became more amicably inclined, and vouchsafed at length to repose on one half the rug and allow him the other.

When Reuben came home of an evening and found Marjorie either watching for him in the cloisters or sitting in her room, he would throw himself down to repose, both mind and body, and think, not untruly that a man as happy as he was existed but rarely. He adored his wife in his own quiet, intense concentrated fashion; he would have done anything that a man might to give her a pleasure; and yet he knew she did not love him, at least not as she could and had loved. Still, "The dead sleep," he would say to himself, watching her fair head bending over her work. "The dead sleep, and she is my wife—my own." Then he would speak to her aloud, and she would raise her face and look at him with those great dark eyes of hers, so trustingly and gently, and the last pang would die out of his generous, noble heart, and he would think, laying his hand on the radiance of her hair, "She will love me some day—and even if she do not, no love and trust of mine can ever repay her for being my wife."

You see this man loved his wife in a foolish, old-fashioned way—not as we do nowadays, we, who are so wise, so self-contained, so thoughtful, so refined—aye, so refined. I fear me at times that we have refined and refined till naught remains unto us.

Marjorie had now her way with all except Robin. From the day of her entry into Yool Farm the old man could not so much as throw her a civil word; he avoided her—scowled on her. In vain she strove in every way to gain him over; he simply would not. Eternally he chopped wood in the court—eternally she stopped and gave him "Good-day"—eternally he responded with a growl and mutter. Once she sat down on a block of wood, and said:

"Robin, you can't bear me?"

Robin flung down a heavy billet of wood, with a savage mutter, "No!"

"Now, Robin, do tell me why. I can't bear you to dislike me so" (saw, saw, went Robin, but no answer). "Robin, do tell me," she pleaded, more urgently than before.

"Because you be's a lady"—Marjorie started—"and you've been and gone and made a fool of he"—crash went another billet of wood.

"But, Robin, I am not a lady. I work; I give the men their breakfasts. I would do anything to please you; I would saw wood." And in the desperate attempt not to be a lady in Robin's estimation, Marjorie heaved up a great block of wood, and lifted the saw which Robin had stood up by the pile while wiping his brow. He just looked at her from head to foot with supreme scorn and contempt.

"Now don't you go and try any of that cum-fudgery," he said, roughly taking the saw from her. "You be's a lady, and a lady you will be."

"But, Robin—ah! now I know." And Mar-

jorie looked up delighted. "If I am a lady, Reuben's a gentleman, because I'm his wife."

"No, he ain't!" said Robin, furiously. "He a gentleman!—he's a yeoman farmer! He a gentleman!" And he banged his saw against the wood in a rage.

Marjorie did not know the feminine for "yeoman," so was completely nonplussed. She sat down, and, picking up some chips, rubbed them against one another dejectedly.

"Will nothing make you dislike me less, Robin?"

"No! now I ain't agoing to say any more. I don't waste my time!" It was hopeless, as Marjorie thought, getting up and going away. Could she only have heard Robin's sigh of relief at her departure, and muttered words, she might not have gone so quickly. "Nearly did for me that time, leastways, looking so sweet like." Then, with a savage shake, "'No,' I said to myself, said I, 'Robin, you don't give in to them airs,' said I; and I won't. Master's a fool!"

After this, Marjorie for some time gave up trying to win Robin. She just passed him with her usual kindly greeting, but took no further notice of him; and the old man chopping his wood in the court-yard, in the long summer days—or drying apples and plums in the autumn, down in the dungeon—would listen for her voice lilting in the sunny days, and growl and grumble to himself.

The summer drew on, and grew hotter and hotter; the sheep-shearing was all done—with the bleatings and tussles of the terrified sheep, the hot, puffing faces of the men, the loud cries and louder laughter; the after-feast, with great bowls of frumenty stuffed full of currants, the syllabubs, the plum-puddings, the great rounds of spiced beef, and jacks of foaming ale, and the dance far into the summer night in the great barn. Marjorie had helped in the feast, and gone "down the middle and up again" in the dance, and had retired to rest so late that the morning was already trailing her white robes on the edge of the sky.

As the autumn waned came hollow murmurs of rapine and revolt—of burning farms, and gangs of burglars with blackened faces—of misery and destitution, and famine and despair in and around the manufacturing and mining districts. Reuben grew grave in discussing the subject, and rode many miles to meet other farmers, and make arrangements to meet the pressure. He was away from home more and more, and always left orders with Robin to keep the guns loaded and ready for use, to unloose Bruin at night, and bolt and bar the doors and windows at sunset, for, though this was a lonely and out-of-the-way house, still they had been known to attack the loneliest houses, perhaps fearing there the least resistance.

Marjorie used to walk the cloisters at night and wait for Reuben, and on hearing his horse-hoofs shaking the heather, would run around to the wicket-gate and undo it, with words of welcome. He begged her not to continue this habit after dusk, and she reluctantly consented.

However, one night—it was so lovely that she could not resist the longing for fresh air, more especially as all day she had been in-doors busy with preserving and storing fruit—she stole out very quietly, and was soon joined by Bruin.

They strolled up and down; it grew darker and darker, but Marjorie was buried in thought, and quite forgot how time was passing. Presently a low growl from Bruin roused her; she looked up quickly—a dark shadow lay crouched in the corner of the cloisters.

"Who is there?" asked Marjorie, instinctively backing towards the door, which she had left ajar. No answer. The dog growled again, and on Marjorie's again calling and receiving no answer, she made him a sign, and he sprang forward. An unearthly cry, and something small and dark darted past her. It was the Dame. Bruin looked disconcerted, and so did Marjorie. What she could be doing there she could not conjecture. However, Marjorie had been rather scared, and retreated for that eve-

ning. And now night after night began that eerie scratching and whispering at her chamber-door again. Marjorie bore it as long as she could, and then a thought suddenly struck her.

"Reuben," she said, one evening when they were retiring for the night, "I wish you would let Bruin sleep on the mat outside my door."

He looked rather startled, but said "Yes" directly.

Marjorie marched up to bed triumphantly with the dog at her heels, and from that time she was safe. The first night there came a scuffle, a growl, and then a hasty patter of feet, but after that total silence. She had been assured by her husband that there was no outlet to their room save the door in question, so that now she felt quite safe. Marjorie used to take long lonely walks on the moors, or was busy all day in her room, and but rarely saw the Dame. She felt, however, that there was an unseen and evil influence at work around her. At times it made her very uncomfortable, but she could do nothing.

The garden grew and flourished. The little plant formerly known as rose-a-ruby (pheasant's eye) was a great pet of hers, with its bright scarlet and crimson petals; she had gay patches of it with Michaelmas daisies, hollyhocks and sunflowers, sweet-williams, etc., and lavender under her octagon window, from which the view became daily more lovely. The moors shone in golden and purple flake-armor, the swallows held revel around the house, and went flashing forth into the sunlight, the larks sang day by day, and the titmice and wrens were busy and chattering—it was a most lovely autumn. Marjorie grew happier day by day, and a tender reverence and love was springing up slowly, yet surely, for her husband. Night after night Reuben came in weary and dispirited; the plots were thickening. A farm only fifteen miles off had been ransacked, and the master, a young and powerful man, shot through the lungs on resisting, and he was now dying. A more desperate gang, and as report said, far larger, was going around the country. A panic had seized the country people. They were sending their wives and valuables into the villages, and remaining themselves only to look after the work during the daytime. This course Reuben strongly reprobated, putting the country in the very grasp of the mutineers; in fact, leaving the houses defenceless.

About this time a bank, in which he had placed a sum of money, was in an exceedingly precarious state, and he was advised to withdraw his deposit. For some time he held out, but as the times were highly critical, and he could not afford to lose so large a sum, he did at length withdraw it, and brought it home; but he knew the risk he was running, and confided the fact to no living soul except Marjorie. She, and she only, knew that the parcel which Reuben placed in the old cabinet was notes. Marjorie had no idea in what a frightful state the country was, for Reuben carefully avoided telling her all; but she had common sense enough to be aware that it would be very unwise to allow any one to know how large a sum of money was in the house, lonely as it was. Reuben intended reinvesting the money as quickly as possible. But such things are not done in one day, and it was now two weeks since they had had the notes.

Once or twice lately Marjorie fancied she was dogged by the Dame in the dusk. She never went out of the room without locking her door in consequence; and Reuben ordered Bruin's kennel to be placed under the octagon window, as he said in these troublous times it was safer.

Reuben had his eyes and his ears open, and knew more of what was going on than Marjorie gave him credit for. One day he said to her:

"Did you ever go into the Dame's room, Marjorie?"

"No," she said, half smiling—"I am a little afraid of her."

"Well, come with me."

"Oh, Reuben! she will be so angry."

"Never mind. I have an object in view." As they went up the staircase he said very low "I don't like to frighten you, or make you nervous, Marjorie, but do you think you have been followed lately?"

"Yes," she said, quickly, "but I was afraid to tell you."

"Ah! I knew it."

They went on in silence now; at every turning and step up and step down, Reuben gave her a look, as much as to say, "Mark this"—which she fully understood. She had never been over the house with him, and enjoyed this "wander" very much. Presently he turned out of the body of the house sharply to the left, and pointed to a door in the wall—"Look," his eyes said. She did so; he touched the wall gently, and the door opened and showed her a long, dark, narrow stair. "One way," he said very low, and she knew he meant that that was how the Dame came down at times. On his removing the pressure of his finger, the door closed silently. They went on; suddenly he stopped, listened, drew Marjorie's arm through his, and opened a door abruptly. A low, dark, dismantled room was there, and in one corner sat the old woman chinking coin in a stocking. She sprang up.

"Reuben!"

"Aye," he answered, dryly.

"You spy! you worm! you thief!"

"Aye," he said again.

She was speechless with rage. She shook and shivered, her throat and face worked so fearfully that Marjorie feared for her life. "Devil!" she screamed at last, turning on the girl. "Devil! devil! Wait till the blood comes dripping into your life, devil!"

"Hush!" said Reuben, sternly. "Now tell me, Dame, by whose authority did you change your room? I see that is the reason of your passion, my having disturbed you; but if you will change without letting the mistress of the house, my wife"—he spoke more slowly, yet with great emphasis—"know, you must expect to be intruded on; you will go back to your old quarters."

She spat at Marjorie, and, tumbling back the coins into the stocking, muttered, "Yes, I know, I know what would cut your throat and hers too, devil!"

"No more foul language," he said; "I know who might be shut up."

The Dame cowered down directly. "These are only coins," she muttered humbly; "I am an odd old woman."

"Yes, yes, we know all about that," he said, quickly; "we don't want your coins; but come away, my wife, I will show you the rest of the house;" and they went out and left her.

Marjorie wondered greatly what all this meant, and began, "Reuben, what"—but he pressed her arm, and leading her in and out of the rooms in quick succession, they at length reached the octagon again in safety. Still he said nothing in explanation, but went out about some farm matters; and it was not until they were safely in their own room at night that he went around, tried the door, peeped into the cupboard, whistled to Bruin, and heard his answering whine, and then said:

"Marjorie, this is a case of life and death. Don't be frightened. I am quite sure the Dame knows we have the notes in the house. Now she would not willingly have let us know this, and it was only by my having taken her unawares and frightened her into a rage that I could find it out. It was of vital importance to me to know this." He did not tell her that that morning he had had another warning that the house was being watched, and that it was known he had money in it. "Supposing the house were attacked, I am afraid she would tell the burglars where to find the notes; at least she would tell them the most likely places to look in; though I doubt her knowing exactly where the notes are. How she has found out I have any, I do not know. But she is desperately fond of money."

"Then why would she tell?" asked Marjorie.

"Because, first, she would rather save her

own worthless coins; and, secondly, she would do it to spite us. She hates me, only she fears me; and she thinks doubtless, and with reason, that if she could show them this store they would not care to look farther."

"Do you think she knows how much it is?"

"I don't know. But did you not hear what she said about being able to cut our throats? That told me directly she knew." Marjorie was much more frightened than she cared to avow. "Look here," Reuben said, after a little thought, "I will go down to H— tomorrow, and try and find out where I may be able to place the notes in safety. Don't be frightened, my darling, she can't get at them. In two days I can take them away."

"And during that time, Reuben, had they not better be placed somewhere else?"

He thought a moment. "No," he said, "I think not. That cabinet is wonderfully strong—she can't get at them."

Next morning, early, Reuben left on his long ride. He gave especial injunctions to Robin about looking after Marjorie, and gave Katie a hint to the same effect, which caused that faithful maiden to perambulate the premises occasionally, of which more hereafter. Marjorie came down to the gate to see him off.

"You will not be very long," she said, whisperingly, stroking the horse's neck.

"No, not longer than I can possibly help. I have taken the bay on purpose." He bent down and kissed her forehead. "Good-bye," and then he turned away. She stood watching him, her heart throbbing at his kiss, for he kissed her very rarely, and Marjorie was beginning to love her husband, and so was growing very shy of him. He looked back and saw her still there, reined in, and came back; but when he reached her, and saw how full of tears her eyes were, he found nothing to say, saving only, "I won't be long—take care of yourself, my wife."

Reuben's feeling about her was so deep and passionate, he was himself afraid of himself, and dared barely allow himself to utter or think. After that he rode away in earnest, looking back occasionally, and longing to have her with him. Marjorie went in at length, slowly, still thinking of him. What her father had foreseen was coming to pass. She was beginning to love Reuben dearly; he was so gentle, so firm, so tender, so thoughtful, how could she do otherwise? But with Marjorie all strong feeling was of very slow growth, and she struggled against it, until some day unawares she would discover that she felt far more deeply than she herself realized. All that day she spent looking over stores. (Robin was in the court-yard mending rush-bottomed chairs, and very surly he was.) The wall and tree fruit at Yool Farm was magnificent, the remains of the old priory gardens and orchards. The apples were wonderful; such pippins, such numbers without end apparently of pears and plums; so many, in fact, that the ripe fruit fell and lay in little clouds of rich color in places, dappling the moss-grown court, and forming grand repasts for the chickens. No one knew the names of all the delicious kinds. There were pale faint-colored apples, a kind of tender lemon-shade, others nearly flame-colored in parts, with great luscious-looking crimson streaks, or darker ones with brown and scarlet seams on them, the very skin wrinkling with ripeness; then the plums, large, velvety-looking, with a fresh bloom on them wonderful to behold, others of the deepest amber, looking as though they longed to fall into your mouth and burst with their riches.

Down in the dungeon Robin made the surplus fruit undergo some process, by which it came out again wrinkled, it is true, but as sweet and juicy as ever, and this process Marjorie longed to fathom.

She came out, and sat down, shelling peas.

"Robin, there are lots of apples fallen, why don't you go and dry them?"

"Eugh!" growled he.

"I want to go down to the dungeon; will you show me?"

"It's no good your going there—the steps are broken."

"Then how do you get down?"

"Eugh!"

"Will you take me?"

"No!"

"Then I shall go alone;" and, setting down the basket of peas, Marjorie proceeded on her way.

Robin threw down his rushes. "Don't!" he cried; "it's not safe."

"Where you can go, I can," she laughed back, and set off. Arriving at the deep, dark-looking hole, she paused. The steps were very uneven; but she knew he was watching her, so she boldly stepped down—one, two, and a great gap; but she was not to be stopped, and placing her two hands, she swung sideways on to some fallen masonry; down, down, a perfect scramble, almost in the dark; then a long dusty gleam of light, and far below she saw a broad stream of sunshine. Another swing, and yet another, and she was safe. She laughed with glee and proceeded to rummage.

It was a wonderful old place, partially a vault. In one corner stood a queer square frame, something like an old mangle, but which Robin declared was a rack; on it stood piled heaps and heaps of apples and plums; matting, garden utensils, rope, packets of seed, straw, hay, sand, wood, peat, lay stretched on all sides; a soft aromatic odor of bass, ivy, seeds, herbs, fir-cones, pervaded the place. "How delightful for a wet day," thought Marjorie. "To think that old Robin keeps this all to himself." She sat down and dreamed a little dream in the soft, musky bass. How still it was; only a whirring insect flew past with a boom; a fir-cone her dress had displaced rolled down to her feet. Robin was silent up there. What a place to dream in! Marjorie thought of all her pet books. She would bring down her old Chaucer, and Spenser's "Fairy Queen," and "Will" Shakespeare; she could have given Robin a good shaking for never having told her of this place before. She heard Bruin whining and Katie calling, and playfully kept silent, and thought out long, sweet thoughts, and found herself wondering whether "rest" would not be the one great eternal boon in heaven. "Rest" with those we love, and "light"—for she loved the "light;" as she sat in the tender glow of the sun through the ivy which partially covered the opening through which she had descended, she decided that light was "very good." She could have sat so dreaming for hours: it was so peaceful, and her thoughts reverted to her husband so tenderly and gravely.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "CORPSE-LIGHTS."

In the evening, when all the men had gone, Marjorie took a web of flax to uncoil and sort, and went into the Refectory. The day which had been so lovely and peaceful was ending in a rough and stormy night. It was "dusking" rapidly; and Marjorie, who knew Reuben could not return till the following day or evening, sat busy working, and wondering where he was and what he was doing. Later on, Robin came in and had his supper, and then went off again. It grew darker and darker; the fire was dying down, but Marjorie did not remark it till she thought she heard a faint hustling and bustle near the door. "Mice," she said to herself, and went on with her low humming, after a long peer into the darkness. Time passed, when suddenly there was a clang!—her foot had touched the fire-irons, and they swung around from their chain. This disturbed her, and she stooped to pick them up. As she did so, a glitter near her caught her eyes. She looked up quickly, and saw—yes!—no!—could she believe her eyes?—two globes of light burning at each end of the tables near the door—two flickering globes of bluish light.

In an instant the legend about this vaulted hall struck her. She turned cold, and, with the chained poker still in her hand, sat quite quiet, watching. The lights were motionless

For a second, then began slowly gliding along the edge of the tables toward her; when they reached the end, they turned the corner, and went gliding up the reverse side. There was a profound hush—Marjorie could hear the beatings of her heart—and a wild, unconquerable throb of anxiety for Reuben's safety wrung her heart. She knew what they were—"corpse-lights;" she knew what they portended—death. Half-way up, one flickered, paused, hovered, and went out just over the place where Robin sat; the other went slowly on to the end, and vanished.

Marjorie was so terrified she dared not move. The silly little thing never took into consideration the state of the atmosphere—heavy and damp, and charged with electricity—or the age of the wood; never thought of phosphorous, etc. One thought did strike her—was Robin or the Dame playing her a trick? She uttered a quick prayer against the evil one, and then rising, walked with bold front but shaking limbs around both tables. No one there; though it was so pitch-dark under them that one could hardly see. She lit a candle—a rushlight—and searched again—nothing; and then she allowed the terrible thought to gain ground that Reuben was in danger. She went to the door for the purpose of calling Katie, but changed her mind, and locking it behind her, with one fearful glance at the fresco, called Bruin, and went up to bed—but not to rest. For long, long, she knelt, praying for her husband's safety, and at length fell asleep on her knees.

The next morning was wet, dull, windy. Marjorie rose with a bad headache; she was all day sorting flax and hemp. The Dame haunted her—came in and out, and was as restless as animals are generally before a storm. In the afternoon Katie was to go over to the cottage for some herbs which would only grow in the garden around it, and which were now ripe and ready for drying. Robin went on with his eternal mending of rush-bottomed chairs. Bruin had gone with Katie. Only two dogs remained in the barn which we spoke of once before—the rest had been sold; for, during the distress, Reuben had given so largely to the miserable, starving people that he had been forced to reduce in all his expenditures.

"Don't be late," Marjorie had said to Katie; to which she had answered, "No," and gone away. Marjorie's headache grew worse and worse; she sat back in the great arm-chair, and leaned her forehead against one of its wings; Pussy coiled at her feet. Robin was heard feeding the dogs; they were growling and restless, and he hit them one or two heavy blows. Marjorie wondered vaguely when Reuben would be back; she expected him almost directly, but he did not come. It grew late, and presently Robin came in, and questioned her when she expected master?—he ought to have been here by now. Marjorie turned pale.

"Oh, Robin, is it very late? Do go and look at the ridge. My head is splitting—I can scarcely lift it."

He muttered, and walked away. Half an hour. Marjorie was beginning to doze when in he came again.

"Where's Katie?"

"Not home yet? why, it's getting dark. Robin, she must be in!"

"Dang it! I say she is not! The wench is getting beyond herself, staying out in these times—I want to shut up."

"Oh! don't, just yet—wait five minutes," and, thoroughly roused, Marjorie tried to rise, and staggered up. "It's very extraordinary—I feel—feel—so sleepy," she muttered, and her head fell forward heavily.

Robin looked at her keenly, and, coming up to her, shook her suddenly.

"Awake!" he said, anxiously; "mistress! mistress!"

"She answered faintly, as one in a dream:

"Yes."

"Good Lord deliver us! she's been drugged," he cried out aloud in alarm.

A little harsh voice said close to him:

"Hie!"

He turned around, and eyed the Dame suspiciously.

"Here help me to lift her back to that chair," he said. The old woman clutched her fingers in the long, fair hair, as though strangling some one. The man bent over her anxiously.

"Foul play!" he muttered.

"What?" said the Dame.

"Naught," he answered.

The head lay heavily back, and the blue lines around the mouth and eyes deepened ominously. Robin bade the crone fetch brandy; she went to do so, but on second thoughts he called her back loudly and went himself.

"Don't touch her!" he said, warningly.

"I? I love her; fair lady!—gentle lady!—sweet lady!" and she licked her two long teeth, and champed them sharply yet softly, as one might imagine a vampire would do; then, when he went out, she bent closely to her, and breathed hot and fierce in her face: "Sleep, sleep, she-devil! The worms creep in, the worms creep out. The grave is narrow, dark, and chill. The bones lie white and round and polished; where they rend their shrouds and cry, misery, misery. Fair you are, pure and sinless; so die, die, die!" Robin came back with brandy, and, venting bitter curses on the tardy Katie, he raised Marjorie's head, and forced a few drops between the closed, dry lips, while the Dame softly stroked the long, white hands, saying, "Fair lady! sweet lady!"

"Hold that!" growled Robin. "She's no lady," (if Marjorie could but have heard him!), "but she's my master's wife, and a more sweet-natured woman there ain't nowhere."

"Sweet, sweet, sweet!" And the long, bony, grasping, claw-like hands strayed over the fair hair and white brow.

"She's awsome bad," he said at last, as, after a full half-hour she turned, opened her eyes, and sighed, or moaned rather.

"She won't die, though," said the crone.

"Look at the color coming back under the eyelids and around the gums."

"Water!" she said, faintly.

Robin could find none, but brought a jug of warm milk (one of those happy providences); it did her more good than anything; she drank freely of it.

"Bad for her," said the Dame, trying to get it away. But Marjorie struggled faintly against her, and Robin bade her gruffly "Be still!" She drank it, and was then violently sick; after that she sat up and was almost herself again. "Katie," she said, and then it struck Robin that Katie was not yet back, and that the house was wide open. He went out, and Marjorie leaned back, faint nearly unto death.

The Dame disappeared; she heard Robin shutting and barring the Refectory windows, but vaguely; she did not know where she was quite, her limbs shook as with ague, she felt ill and weary, and all shaking in her head. Just then a rattle at the window roused her; she thought of Reuben—he was doubtless going to call her through the window; she struggled to her feet joyfully, and—saw three or four men gazing in at her. She gave a piercing shriek.

"Robin! Robin! the door!—the robbers!"

One man fired through the window at her, but it never even went near her; and then they turned and dashed around the house. Marjorie was roused to immediate action, though she was not fully conscious of what she was doing. She tore open the cabinet, hastily undoing the secret spring, and, seizing the bundle of notes, stuffed them into the bosom of her dress, then turned and ran out of the room, bolting and barring the door after her; she met Robin running down the long stone passage.

"Go into the Refectory," he said; "it is safely barred. Close the door, and open to no one but me. I must fasten the rest of the house up." Then bending toward her, he said low, "Beware of the Dame," and sped past her. He had a hatchet in one hand and a musket in the other.

Marjorie ran swiftly into the Refectory, and closed and barred the door. Two pistols lay on the table; she took one in each hand, and white as death, but strong as death, stood up by the

fire-place, with the one thought, "Thank God, Reuben is not here."

A movement near her showed her the Dame cowering down in a heap, and chattering very fast:

"One, two, three, killed a crow; one, two, three, dripping blood; one, two, three, notes and gold; one, two, three, sickness and death."

Marjorie bade her be silent, and listened in great anxiety. One or two heavy blows were struck on the shutters of the Refectory windows; but then they seemed to have gone around to the other side of the house. She heard crashing wood, one or two shots, but no cries, no noise; it was all done so silently, as far as voices were concerned, that it made it all the more fearful and awful. She wondered the two dogs had not given warning, she wondered where Katie and Bruin were, she prayed fervently that Reuben might not come home, but all in a stunned sort of way. Her head whirled like a water-wheel, and except for a great effort she could hardly stand erect. She heard them battering in some windows, two more shots, and then a voice, "Fire!" The Dame rose and crept toward her, wringing her hands.

"Oh! if they burn the house. Oh! lady, lady!"

"Be quiet!" said Marjorie, trembling exceedingly. "These walls are stone—they can't burn us."

"No, but the room—the cabinet."

Marjorie turned on her. "Room—cabinet?"

"Yes, my coins," she said, plaintively—"my coins."

Crash went something, and a strong smell of burning pierced the doors and windows.

"God deliver us! God, my Father, help!" said Marjorie, very low.

More shots, wood crashing, cries at length, hurried voices, the tramp of many feet, a tremendous struggle outside the door, and then crash—crash—a hatchet, or two or three, came against the stout oaken and nail-studded door.

"Don't open!" said a voice, choked with agony; and Marjorie, recognizing Robin's voice, quailed with fear.

The Dame knelt at her feet, holding her dress, and shrieking in such a weird and awful way it was like a rat in a trap; and Marjorie, trying to fix her thoughts in one direction, and not wonder vaguely how many plums ought to go to a gallon, or how many stones would fill a grave, stood bravely up, and with her pistols tightly clinched in either hand, waited. The door was strong and splendidly grained; it took ten minutes to force out one panel, but that once done all was at an end; two violent heaves by ten or twelve men, and it was forced partially out of its socket, and they climbed in. They were all strong men, gaunt with famine, and black with powder and smoke.

They remained standing in a group at the door, while one came forward with an iron bar in his hand. Marjorie brought her pistol suddenly on a level with his head, and clicked the lock.

He paused.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Food and money."

"Take all the food there is in the house."

"We have."

The Dame, who had been silent with terror, now screamed loudly,

"We have no money."

"You lie, beldame!" returned the man, savagely. "We know you have money; we know Reuben Yool has bank-notes to the value of two hundred pounds in the house, and we will have them—eh, lads?" turning to the men.

"Aye," they muttered.

"Come, it's of no use hiding it, mistress," the leader went on, turning to Marjorie; "we have had great trouble to get in, and must be paid to the tune of two hundred pounds for our trouble. If not"—He paused ominously.

"You may go and look for it," said Marjorie, bravely, still counting how many stones

would fill a grave, or how many heads would fill a basket.

"It's not worth the trouble," said the man, doggedly. "You may as well tell us, for we can make you."

"I won't, and I don't think you can," she said, calmly.

The man was staggered, but after a whispered colloquy with the rest came forward again.

"We have nearly killed Robin, and he won't tell. He swears there is none. Now, on my oath, I'll kill you if you don't tell."

Marjorie turned as white as death, but stood quite silent, with her pistol still leveled.

He came toward her.

"Move another step and I'll fire!" she said.

Again he wavered; this dauntless woman cowed him.

"Well, then, we search the house."

Now the same had urgent reasons for not wishing the house to be searched—her coins! They moved off; when suddenly she sprang up, and, catching hold of the last man, whispered,

"The ebony cabinet!"

Marjorie, watchful and alert, heard the words.

"Thank God, I took them," she thought.

The man shook off the Dame.

"Why did you tell me?" he said, suspiciously, "you old witch, you! No one asked you."

"Because I can hate," said the Dame, with glittering eyes. Her fear of fire was over, and her natural temperament was coming back.

They all went out, leaving Robin sitting on the floor between the wall and the table, with the most frightful gash over his left eye, from which the blood trickled slowly; he moaned now and then in his agony. Marjorie, now the strain was off, began counting again so many stones to one grave, so many heads to one basket; she could hardly keep from saying it out loud.

The old woman sank down in her heap again, muttering, "Paid in full!" But though she watched Marjorie keenly, she took no notice of the suffering man, whose head lay against the wall. Crash, crash! and a strong smell of fire; they were breaking open the cabinet, or burning it. A drowsy feeling came over Marjorie, her grasp relaxed its tension, her head whirled and whirled. Suddenly there was a shout and rush and tramp, and back they all came, but no notes.

"You lied!" said the man who was leader, "or else she has put them elsewhere. Come, fire or no fire, we will search you!"

Two men sprang forward. Marjorie fired, but the pistol was knocked up and backward; the bullet struck Phenuel. A desperate, despairing struggle, and she was overborne; they bent her backward over the great table, and tore the shrouding kerchief from her neck and bosom; she struggled vainly—a crushing blow on her head and arm, and she became insensible.

The dawn rose on the sacked and wrecked farm. The shutters were torn down, part of the furniture was burned; the beautiful cabinet had been splintered, the silver arabesques forced out with a red-hot iron. Marjorie raised herself feebly; something large and heavy came up against her, and a cold tongue licked her face and hands: it was Bruin, whining piteously, with one ear nearly severed from his head, and two paws broken. Then she sat up on the table, and pushed back her hair, which hung in great masses around her face and throat; her kerchief lay on the floor, stained with blood; one pistol was lying in the wood-ashes, and the other was hurled to the extreme end of the room. Through the hole in the shutters came dull light, flickering in a sodden way, cold and sickly-looking, on the broken table, and the bullet hole in the wall was in Phenuel's mouth, and gave him a weird and ghastly smile.

Marjorie laughed a little, low laugh, and the dog howled; then he pulled her dress and

whined. She stood up, trembling all over, sick and dizzy, and moaned. A white cap and withered face peeped in at the door. Marjorie stretched her hands toward it, and it vanished. She felt inclined to sing, and tried an old sea song, but the husky tones echoed hollowly, and she began to cry in miserable, weak sobs.

Presently she stopped and crept along by degrees to the door—the smashed remains of it, rather; the agony caused by the motion was intense. As she reached it, she saw Robin lying behind the table, and for one instant reason came back; she struck her hand against the table and crept round to him. The blood had dried and clotted his hair in long drabbles over his face, his eyes had sunk in their sockets, he was of a deadly pallor, and the lips were drawn back and tightened over the teeth in the most shocking way.

"Poor thing!" moaned Marjorie, touching his cheek with one hand; Bruin licked the closed eyes and lips, and whined; Marjorie crouched under the table, and now and then touched the clinched hand and said, "Poor thing!"

The day began—no one came. She had grown dull and drowsy again, her head against the table; a sickness unto death was stealing over her; very, very surely she was dying. An hour later and it would have been too late forever—when the rapid galloping of horse-hoofs came over the moor, six men urging them on at a mad and furious pace. One glance at the smashed windows, one swing from the saddle to the ground, and then, leaving one to look to the animals, they dashed round to the front, through the open porch, scrambling over the broken door, and a low, hoarse voice called faintly, "Marjorie! Marjorie! my wife, my darling!" Some one came stumbling along to the table, in the dim light, and saw her; she looked up dully with her glazing eyes, and laughed faintly—a laugh that thrilled with terror and anguish the heart of the man who bent over her; he touched her broken arm, and with a shriek of agony Marjorie fainted on her husband's breast.

CHAPTER V.

WHY KATIE DID NOT COME BACK.

To go back a little. Katie had trudged over the waste cheerfully enough the preceding day, to get the herbs from the cottage. Bruin followed. When she reached the garden, she saw that she had only come just in time. Some wild animal had broken down part of the fence, and some of the herbs were entirely destroyed. She was a long time gathering the remainder together, and then bethought her of blocking up the gap in the hedge. All this time, unobserved by her, Bruin had been sniffing uneasily round and round the house; and now, planting his fore feet against the door, he began baying furiously and angrily.

Katie came up curiously and tried the door, but of course found it fastened. "Get down!" she said to Bruin—"what is the good of all that row?" but the dog persisted in scratching wildly at the door and tearing at the panels. She walked round the house and looked at the windows; everything looked as quiet and undisturbed as possible; so, laughing at Bruin, and imagining he smelt a rat or stoat, or something of that kind, she went round to the paddock, and pulling some stray bits of wood out of a pile of old timber, she began fastening up the gap in the fence. One plank would not fit in, and she knelt down to try and fix it more securely, when a sudden loud and fearful howl from the dog roused her in alarm. She rose, and the next instant her hood was thrown forward over her face, her arms were pinioned, and she was lifted off her feet and carried, she supposed, into the house. There seemed to be a violent struggle between the dog and some men, but her head was so muffled she only heard indistinctly growls, howls, oaths, and cries, a few heavy blows, and then silence—a silence so long, so horrible, that Katie, frightened and hurt, swooned. When she returned to consciousness, there was still the same silence; she moved softly—no noise; she called to Bruin

—dead silence. She struggled to rise, but could not—one of her ankles was badly twisted. She felt her wrists swelling beneath her body, for they had layed her on her back, with her arms under her. With a violent wrench she turned round on her side, and, doing so, her hood fell off, and she saw where she was—in the kitchen of the cottage, with the back door open and the cold night air blowing in upon her. With the dull leaden light came reflection.

Why had she been bound like this? What were these men doing in the cottage? A sudden terrible thought struck her—they had gone to attack the farm.

Katie, thinking of her dear mistress all lonely, with no one but Robin and the Dame in the house, struggled violently to free herself but could not; she nearly screamed with pain, as the cords cut into her well-rounded arms; but setting her teeth, determined on getting free, only silently, in case anyone should be listening, she rolled round and round on the floor, trying to reach the door, and to reach the yard where she had noticed an old reaping-hook lying. The pain was intense, but the brave woman bore it. With a sudden jerk, she came crashing up against the kitchen table, such a blow it sickened her, and for sometime she lay still; then she called hoarsely to Bruin, but the dog was gone. She began rolling again, and came against something wet and dark, and shuddered together, seeing it was blood. The dog had fought valiantly; they had nearly killed him, but he had got away and reached Marjorie at last, as we have seen, only too late to be of any assistance.

Katie was faint with pain, thirst, and anxiety, but rolled on and on; at last the door was reached, and the delicious coolness of the atmosphere gave her strength; she gave a look round the room before taking a final roll. There were fresh embers in the fire-place, and a pile of wood, some bones of a rabbit, half eaten, and a thick stick.

"Ah!" she thought, "if I could only lay it on their backs!"

A plunge down the steps, and by degrees she got up to the reaping-hook, but it was old and rusty; she took it up in her mouth and put it up against the doorstep, and then rubbed her hands backward and forward over it; it took a long, long time to do. Often she gashed her arms and fingers, and once or twice she nearly fainted. She was awful to look at, ghastly pale, and smeared with blood, but she persevered once more, and then with a tremendous wrench she was free. She sat up trembling, and laughed with triumph, while a fierce longing to be after those cowards possessed her. She twisted herself along to the water-butt, undid her heavy shoe, drew it off, and chafed her twisted foot with both bleeding and almost maimed hands. By a great exertion she clung to the edge of the barrel, and after soaking her kerchief in the water, tied it round the foot tightly, and then was able, after a half hour's good rubbing and wetting, to stand erect. She limped back into the kitchen, seized the cudgel, and proceeded—minus one shoe—to start for the farm, her one enthralling idea Marjorie's safety. How often she had to sit down faint and dizzy, how often she could hardly forbear screaming with pain, as her wounded foot or hands ached and smarted, I should be afraid to say.

It was nearly three hours from the time of leaving the cottage before she reached the farm—broad daylight; and as she saw the wreck and ruin around it, her heart misgave her terribly. She managed to get round the garden well enough, and there she found all the men congregated near the porch in dead silence. There was a universal cry on seeing her; but the brave, good Katie gave way at last, and stumbled forward, fainting, and was carried by them, gently enough, into the kitchen, where she came to again. Her worst forebodings were realized—Marjorie was dying and Robin dead—whereupon, foolishly enough, she "went off" again as fast as possible.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AFTER-SHOCK.

For weeks and weeks Marjorie lay on the verge of the grave. The arm had been broken in no less than three places, and the blow on her head seemed to have crushed all life, all reason out of her. She lay back with her great hollow eyes burning with fever, raving incessantly about the lost notes, or counting how many plums would go to a gallon, how many heads fit into one basket. Her beautiful white throat and bosom were covered with bruises received in the struggle, and her fingers were scarred and seamed by scratches and cuts.

Reuben went nearly wild with agony of mind. He never left her; he and Katie nursed her day and night. The old doctor, who had come to see her father when ill, came now to see her; he set the broken arm ever so tenderly, while Reuben groaned and shuddered at her agony, and turned sick and faint for her sake. At first they had given no hope for her life, but gradually she remained the same for so long that the doctor said, could she but rally from the after-weakness, she might still live, and since then the husband was quiet, quite silent, but with an intense concentration in look and manner that made the kind-hearted surgeon tremble for him should his hope prove delusive. Reuben would sit looking at her, so wasted, so awfully changed, and think of her as she had been on the morning he left her, till his heart was like to break; he thought of the fair oval face that had bent so shyly to kiss his horse's neck, of the little white hands that had waved him a last good-bye; and then thought of how he had seen her next, laughing in his face in delirium, sitting by the poor dead old man, a ghastly and fearful sight, till he nearly madened at the recollection, and hiding his face in the bedclothes, stifled his agony so. Neither the doctor nor Reuben nor Katie knew the real cause of Marjorie's terrible and unceasing weakness and delirium.

The shock and the pain had been, and were, terrible, but the deleterious drug that she had taken retarded her recovery more than these. Who was there to tell them? The old man who had discovered it lay cold and stark in his bloody grave, and none else knew of it, saving the Dame, and she was not likely to tell. The doctor knew that there was some ulterior power at work, but could not discover what, and the poor victim only moaned incoherently of notes and cabinets and plums and giddiness and headache. But surely and silently the effects of the drug drained her little strength and kept her low.

Katie, with her arms bound up, watched her day and night, and Reuben did the same. Poor Bruin, with his limping paws and minus one ear, whined at her door, and lay there every night. The men came home to their early breakfast and asked anxiously after "the mistress;" and one or two brought a few late flowers for her, which were always laid on her pillow, and which seemed to please her by their cool fragrance.

The Dame was less visible than ever, and was never heard to speak; and Marjorie grew no better, but less restless and light-headed—yet so weak—oh! so weak. When she held up her white hands you could see through them, and her cheeks were sunken and hollow, while her large dark eyes became filled with a mournful, wistful expression, heart-rending to see. She never spoke now, save in the periods of delirium.

Three months passed. The burglars had been taken, five of them, at least, and part of the notes recovered; but, as Reuben thought bitterly, flinging them down on the floor, with fury at his heart, nothing could give back to Marjorie her health and life. He would not ride away from her to prosecute the wretches; he said the whole thing might go; but there were plenty of accusers, and two were hung, sworn to their death by the widow of the farmer who had been shot.

When Reuben had been so late on the evening of the day on which he had left Yool Farm,

he had put up at a hostelry on the outskirts of the town, not at his usual place of rest, and he did not go there until the evening of the following day. As he rode up and dismounted, a man put a paper into his hand, and then made off. He had opened it, and read, "The farm will be attacked to-morrow." The scrawl was barely legible, but Reuben knew almost by instinct what it meant; he had rushed into the inn, and meeting there several of his friends—at least men that he knew and could trust—he had explained the case to them, and they had mounted and ridden at speed, but had arrived too late to render any real assistance. To whom he was indebted for the information he never knew, nor how the rumor of his having money in the house had spread.

When they had lifted Marjorie away from the wounded man, they found he was dead, and poor old Robin was carried to the same lonely cemetery where lay Marjorie's father.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MINIATURE.

WINTER passed away, and now it was March again. The wind was piping shrilly to the wastes of golden gorse. The gold-finches and ousels were out on the moor, and the larks sang all day. The clouds lay in white masses athwart the sky, or scudded like white-sailed ships over an azure mere. In the garden, hepaticas, snow-drops, blue-bells, crocuses, and golden daffodils were springing. The ivy on the old walls looked greener than ever; the sparrows were in wild commotion. The wall-flowers scented strongly under the octagon window. The bees were busy and stirring. Poor Bruin limped out to a patch of sunlight and lay down to warm himself.

The men in the farm-yard, the shepherds with the young lambs, whistled over their work. In the sawpit two men were hard at work close to the old wall with the ruined window in it, and they joked and laughed when the dust fell on them thickly, or lay in heaps on the great broad dock-leaves. Down by the pond, under the twisted fir-trees, three broods of young ducks were having a sailing-match; it was dangerous work too, for a great fat water-rat was watching them, and who knew to which of them he might take a fancy?

The window in Marjorie's room was wide open, and she was lying on her bed fully dressed. Reuben was going to carry her down stairs for the first time. (Katie stood on the lowest step, wiping away a few stray tears of delight, and calling herself an old fool in a low tone.) He wrapped a thick shawl round her, for she was very thin and chilly, and then lifting his light burden, came carefully down the broad stairs. Marjorie's head lay on his breast, and her arms were twined round his neck. She looked so helpless, so changed, so ill, that Katie—with a sudden, vivid recollection of the morning she had come down a year ago, looking so full of life and health—made a most fearful stutter in trying to repress a storm of sobs, and had to rush out at the porch, and, bringing herself up in the barn, began to abuse herself violently.

Reuben carried his wife along the narrow, dark passage, and he felt her shudder violently as they passed the Refectory door. He turned pale himself, but passed on quickly—wordless—into the octagon room. The windows were closed, but the sun streamed through them; Pussy jumped off the window-seat with a flump, and came to rub herself against his legs; the fire roared up the chimney, the great arm-chair was all re-covered with shining scarlet leather; flowers were on the table, flowers on the mantelpiece, flowers in the window. He laid her gently down in the chair, wrapped her shawl round her, and stood anxiously, with a beating heart, for her to open her eyes, which she had closed tightly since they had come in.

The doctor had said it would be a great trial to her coming down for the first time again; but that it must be got over; and he had advised Reuben not to alter anything in the

rooms, for fear she should miss it, and ask questions—a thing of all others to be avoided. He had turned her chair partially round, so that she did not face the cabinet. At last she opened her eyes and smiled at her husband.

"I am glad I can come down," she said, faintly. "You can go out again now and look after your work. You spoiled me;" and she took his two hands in her white ones, and pressed them together.

Reuben so dreaded her asking about Robin that, after putting by her all she wanted, he said he would give a look to the men, and went out for a little. She lay quiet, for she was terribly weak; and he need not have feared her asking questions. She dared not, there were so many things to ask; and to her the past was all so confused she could hardly recollect what had been real and what she had dreamed in fever.

Presently she bent down to stroke Pussy, and her eye fell on the cabinet. She looked at it fixedly, as though trying to remember; then, with a throb of anxiety, she thought of Edward's last letter, and one or two relics of her father. The suspense was more than she could bear; she tried to stand up, and found she could, and by degrees she got across the room. She pushed the door, and her eye fell on a vacant space; no letter—no anything; she saw the marks of fire on the woodwork and carvings, and knew then that they had in all probability been burned.

Sick at heart, she tried all the drawers—empty! In one drawer lay a common wooden button, and mechanically she touched it, when to her astonishment a sliding panel sprang up, and an inner drawer showed itself in the thickness of the cabinet sides. She felt in it and brought out a miniature; it was that of a woman, and was tied round by a lock of long ebony-colored hair. Carelessly she held it in one hand and looked still further, but there was nothing else; so she pushed back the button, which slid into a hole, and fitted exactly into the floor of the cabinet, so exactly that she no longer saw it—it had been displaced by the shock before. And then she crawled back to her chair, and sat sorrowful for the loss of her treasures.

By and by she bethought her of the miniature. She turned it round; on the back were the initials "H. C—," and a blank; then the date, "17—." The face was wonderfully beautiful. A very young girl, not more than seventeen, with proud, dark-blue eyes, an exquisitely chiseled mouth and chin, and a half-sarcastic, wholly wicked expression—an expression that so fascinated Marjorie by its intensity that she could not take her eyes off it; and when Reuben came in, she showed it to him. He started violently.

"Why, Marjorie, where did you find it?"

She told him. He looked at it curiously, then said:

"It is better burnt; it ought never to have been there, and shall never stay here while you are here."

Then he placed it in the fire, and heaped coals over it.

Marjorie marveled, but said nothing. The eyes watched her, as the fire went raging up the face toward them, with such a diabolical look—so living, so vivid—and then turned blood color in the flames, and went out as it were. The hair twisted and writhed as though in pain, and burned with a blueish light. Marjorie was half-scared, and held Reuben very tightly; while he looked so stern and hard that she was quite puzzled.

"Did you know who it was?" she asked

"Yes," he answered, curtly.

And she said no more.

When she was better and stronger, he told her it had been the Dame; but, as she had surmised it before, she was in no way surprised.

For some days Marjorie wondered why Robin did not come, but concluded he was busy; and she had not yet summoned sufficient courage to go into the Refectory. However, he did not come, and she did not hear his old rough voice grumbling in the courtyard: at length she asked, and Reuben had to tell her. She was

very, very sorry. In spite of his rough ways, Marjorie had liked the poor old man; he was connected with a great deal of her past life, and seemed part of the farm; she could not bear to think of the old quadrangle without him, and shed some bitter tears in thinking of his death. Of the Dame she never spoke—only shuddered violently whenever she heard the click of her pattens in the passage, and seemed full of some almost animal instinct of fear with regard to the old woman.

Bruin and she made more of each other than ever; and once down stairs again she seemed to gain ground rapidly and steadily. But at the end of the month she had not yet been into the Refectory; it seemed as if she could not; the "corpse-lights" were ever burning there, in her imagination, and she saw the blood-stains lying still wet and shining.

Reuben rejoiced over her recovery; and it was only when her arm failed in lifting anything, or a sudden twist gave her pain, that his face darkened.

CHAPTER III.

HERLA.

THE whole winter had been one of wild and intense excitement. The bread riots, the incendiary fires, the universal smashing of mills and factories with new machinery, had kept the entire country in an uproar; bands of sailors and soldiers, discharged, now the war was at an end, roamed at large, reckless and lawless; and men who had any property cared but little to be abroad after nightfall.

Yool Farm was so lonely and so entirely out of any track whatsoever that it was saved in a great measure from the importunities of passing tramps; moreover, two fierce mastiffs lorded it in the barn, in place of the two setters poisoned by the robbers; and night after night they were let loose at sunset, and the tramp was yet to be found who would venture within reach of their formidable jaws.

Poor old Bruin was past hard work. Of an evening he was called in and lay before the fire, and then slept on the mat outside Marjorie's door. What care she took of the poor, maimed, faithful brute need not be told.

Caleb York, the man who replaced Robin at the farm as general servant, was very different from his predecessor. A strong giant of six feet two, with flaming hair and ruddy cheeks, who was never without some ballad on his ready tongue; of genial, light humor; a man who whistled over his work; bared his brawny arms and chopped wood as you would chip a twig; who strode about ever busy, over cheerful, ever ready; who teased Katie and awed the Dame, and would have walked barefoot to please his mistress; who would lift a tiny chicken with as dainty and tender a hand as any child, if it got in his way and he feared to hurt it.

Often when Marjorie heard the crush of his hatchet, or the thud with which he threw down the logs of wood, she smiled half sadly thinking of the difference between this bustling, loquacious, cheerful Hercules, and the quiet, stern, taciturn old Robin.

Marjorie delighted in going down to the little "beck" that flowed out from the pond under the fir-trees, and watch the "dish-washers" flitting along over the smooth stones, or poisoning themselves by balancing up and down with their tails; they would twitter a song to her, so sweet and wild and free that it somehow made the very sunlight brighter, the breeze fresher and keener. She would sit by an old thorn-bush and harken dreamily, and let her thoughts wander far, far away. She had never quite regained her strength, her old elasticity of temperament—often and often now she was weary before the day was over, but she struggled against it. Reuben watched her keenly; he was aware of it too, but he never mentioned it to her.

Once only had the Dame come across her. She was peeping into the Refectory window, for she had not yet been in, and she saw the

old woman crooning over the fire; she was clutching something in her hand, and Marjorie, fascinated as it were, saw it was hair which she was burning; the sickening smell penetrated to where she stood, and she moved hastily. The Dame looked up and saw her; at first she hid the bundle, then quickly got up and slid through the outer door, and before Marjorie was aware of it the old woman was at her elbow, smirking and courtesying.

"Good-even," she said, showing the two teeth, which glittered fiercely. "Good-even." Marjorie shrank from the evil look. "Good-even," she answered.

"If you wait, I will bring you the blood-money," she said mysteriously, and vanished.

As to waiting!—Marjorie fled. But next day she observed that the Dame followed her; at last she was weary, and said:

"Well?"

"You think me like the dead," said the Dame with a snarl—"not to speak till spoken to—oh, he!" Marjorie made no reply. "Well-a-day! sit down." They were in the garden; Marjorie did so. "One, two, three, blood-money," and the Dame chinked three coins, black with age, into her lap.

"When I do ill the devil pays," quoth she, and made off.

Marjorie felt as if the money were burning her dress, and scraping a hole in a chink of of the masonry, put the coins in and went away from the spot quickly. She told Reuben, who said she had done quite wisely, and a suspicion entered his mind as to who had caused old Robin's death.

One day Reuben had come in late and was going into the kitchen for a draught of ale, when he saw the Dame in the act of dropping something into a coffee-pot. He hid himself and watched. She threw in something, and the coffee hissed and boiled; a cold sweat broke out on Reuben's brow, and with a single spring he caught her arm; she yelled out, for his grasp was like a vise.

"What have you put in?" he said, very low. "Silence!" as she uttered yell on yell, and he put his strong hand over her mouth, dreading lest Marjorie should hear, then caught the coffee-pot, and poured out the contents into a cup.

"Drink it!" he said. She struggled violently, but he was firm as iron. "Drink it!" She spat in his face, and then, seeing no alternative, seized the cup as if to drink and flung it into the fire. "You devil!" said Reuben, filled with terror and fury; "you have put poison in it—look at that blue flame."

"He! he! he!"

"Not another night do you sleep in this house, not another hour do you stay here," he said, furiously, thinking of his wife at the mercy of this fearful creature. "Begone!—hish!"

He opened the door and she fled; he went back to Marjorie after destroying the coffee-pot, and bidding Katie, who had returned, make some more coffee, he gave her a slight warning, which caused her cheeks to turn the color of the flags in the kitchen, and forbade her to mention the circumstance to any one. That night, when Marjorie slept, Reuben went to the Dame's room. There she sat glowering at him in a heap on the floor. He stood over her.

"Herla," he said, sternly, "you have offended me past forgiveness. I have kept you here, knowing *who* and *what* you are. I have fed you and clothed you. I have allowed you to sleep under the same roof as my pure wife. I have borne with you in every way. You thought, perhaps, I did not know of your nightly prowlings round our room, that I have not marked your sinister looks toward my wife, your language, your betrayal the night of the robbery;" he paused, and a quiver passed over the withered face of the old woman. "There is the stain of Robin Earl's blood on *your* hands. There is the withering of my wife's health owing to you."

"Aye, and it shall wither," broke in the crone with passion. "Curse her! I hate her!"

He silenced her. "There is the daily, hourly contamination of your presence to her; yet

I passed this all by, forgave it all, for the sake of one who wronged you bitterly." The woman's face worked awfully. "But now you have tried my wife's life, and that I will never forgive. You would have given death to the purest, gentlest being under God's sun, one who never spoke a cross word to you, or gave you a hard look."

"Yet she feared me," muttered she scornfully; then rising, and raising her tiny figure to its full height, she said: "Now I will speak, Reuben Yool. You best know why you harbored me, and I know why I was grateful for it. I would never have hurt you, never have injured you; you always bore with me as one with his dog, or anything else of brutal extraction. Good and not evil rose in me toward you, and you know it, all things prospered."

"God willed it so," said Reuben, sternly.

"Aye, God, if there were one—or devil, an you like it better. I watched you grow, strong in mind and body, but still what you were born and bred—a yeoman. Then comes a fair-haired lady, and you fall in love with a mad passion; you forget your birth, your farm, *yourself*, and you love this girl, who never gave you a thought save as the servant to do her bidding. The man of the people, one of the herd—you! you were to her—but never mind. She loved one of her own degree, and, mark me, Reuben, *she loves him still*. I know it. She believes, vain fool, that she loves *you now*; but let that sailor return, and she would love him yet."

"He is dead this many a day," said Reuben, quietly, "and I trust my wife as I would God's mercy."

The woman laughed scornfully.

"Man, man, man!—yes, you are but man; I, with my woman's feelings, can better judge than thou—for woman I was once, beautiful, prized, though God and devil know what I am now. I tell you that Marjorie, thy wife, cares more for one hair of her dead lover's head than for one touch of thy living hand; she never loved thee, and for that I hate her—hate her with a hate of hell. She married thee; she was lonely, desolate, uncared for; she trusted thee, she liked thee, but she never loved thee—that was given to another; and, mark me," she went on, lower and lower, "he will come back." Reuben started violently, then smiled at his own emotion. "Reuben, I know it—be warned. The only safety for you is her *death*!"

"Be silent," he said quietly; "you know not what you say."

"I?—yes, I do. You will not be warned, and yet I know the subtle turning of a woman's heart better than you with all your learning, Reuben."

"Well," he broke in, "this is empty talk. You must go—I came here to warn you."

He was thus quiet with her, because he truly believed her to be insane. She had quieted down in speaking to him, but now she blazed up again; she wove her thin fingers in and out.

"Aye," she said, "I will go; but I curse your wife, as you will do some day. Better if she had died that night of the robbery; I tried it then and failed." He recoiled with horror. "Yes, I've twice tried and twice failed; but beware of the third time, Reuben, or mayhap you will thank me then."

"Merciful Heaven?" he said. "Wretch that you are, begone!"

She lifted a bag she had been sitting on, and went out at the door. The moonlight fell full on her weird and bent figure; she turned at the last, and said:

"You have turned me out to die, Reuben Yool; but it is not your doing. I know whom I curse!" and then she was gone.

Reuben stood stupefied with horror at first; in thinking what a danger Marjorie had unconsciously escaped, and then, closing and barring the door, went back to his own room. As he stood bending over Marjorie as she lay sleeping peacefully, with her fair hair flooding the pillow round her sweet, calm face, he marveled at the devilish hate of the old woman; and as he bent to kiss her, he thought involuntarily of her words: "She does not love you; she cares more for one hair of her dead lover's head than for

one touch of thy living hand;" and he thought, "If this came true, my heart would break."

As he kissed her, she turned and moaned, and said faintly,

"Reuben, Reuben!"

And then his heart rose.

Let us once for all have done with the old woman. She disappeared from that night, and was never again heard of. She vanished from out Marjorie's life like a foul bird in some dream of horror, and her vain threat of trying Marjorie's life for the third time was never put into execution—at least to their knowledge. What became of her was never known; but in spite of her wickedness and malignity, Reuben would shudder for years afterward at any peculiarly weird moan in the wind, and think half remorsefully of the helpless creature he had sent adrift that March night, though at the same time he was fully aware how necessary an act it had been. He had tried the following day to obtain some clew to her retreat, if she had one, or if she were wandering on the face of the earth; but the most he ever discovered was that she had gone as far as a seaport town about fifty miles from the farm, and there the clew was lost. He knew she was provided with money, so he did not fear her starving, and gradually she passed out of remembrance. Reuben never told Marjorie of the attempt that had been made on her life, and she believed that the old woman had wandered away from her home in one of her restless fits.

BOOK IV—REUBEN AND MARJORIE

CHAPTER I.

DE PROFUNDIS.

"CALEB! Caleb! you loon! Come here, do!" It was Katie calling Caleb, and he wiped his hands with a comical smile, and went at his leisure. Katie was lifting a large sack of meal, and the said sack had slid off her shoulders and nearly pulled her off her feet. "Oh, aye!" panted the maiden. "Do lift it, Caleb!"

"Why, you're never tired, Katie?" said Caleb, with an odd look; and with one swing he lifted the sack and marched into the house with it. Once there, he stood laughing at Katie.

"Get out," said she; "your big body fills up all the room."

"There now, Katie, you wouldn't send me away without payment?" he said, in a tone so soft and honeyed the very flagstones might have melted.

Not so Katie. She seized a besom, and, waving it round her head, bade him be off.

Caleb stood laughing at her. It was a delicious spring evening, and through the lattice-window, wide open, came the hum of the bees from their hives against the wall.

"They bee-folks don't do anything for naught," said Caleb, advancing bravely.

Katie made a sour face—at least, as sour as her fine countenance could make.

"You be off now, Caleb."

But the man did not seem to heed.

"Leastways, I stay here till I be paid," he said, smiling and seating himself on the window-sill, full in the blaze of the setting sun, and picking some bits of ivy off the outer edge. "You're as cross-grained as that bit of fir-wood. I was splitting up yesterday, Katie—full of knots and twists."

"Hum!" retorted the busy woman, reddening. "You're as lazy as they drone-bees, yonder."

"Not I. I've done hard work in my day; and maybe it's a nice lot of money I'll lay by for the time I choose me a wife, Katie."

"It's to be hoped she'll know how to lay a hand to work, then, or you'll never come to much."

"You're mighty sharp to-night, Katie. Now, you're like my hatchet."

"Of some use, then."

Silence. Now Caleb was courting Katie, and they always fought. Those two, over their wooing.

The bees were home now, the west was dyeing itself a soft peach color with deep tints of amber and crimson, the fowls had gone to rest, and a low, soft mist was rising like fog drapery over the moor; everything looked unreal and dream-like; there was a hush and repose on all things, something mournful and melancholy in the very air. Caleb even hushed his usual loud, cherry voice in saying, "Here comes mistress. She is beautiful!"

Reuben had gone far away over the moors with the shepherd to look at some young lambs, and Marjorie, drawn out by the unearthly beauty of the evening, was strolling up and down before the garden-gate in a reverie. She plucked a great ox-eyed daisy from over the garden-wall and began pulling the petals one by one (Bruin was close at her heels as usual), and she sang to herself as she pulled the flower to pieces.

"Listen to that now," said Caleb, breathlessly; "she do sing like an angel."

"It's more like a bird," said Katie, as her eyes filled. "Hark! there goes that blackbird whistling."

Caleb stretched out of the window, holding on by the sill. "I feel fey to-night, as my grandam used to say—no good will come o' it."

The sweet voices, human and bird voice, went on in a cadence. Marjorie was singing so low you could not hear what she was saying; it was an old sea-song, taught her long years ago by her sometime sailor lover.

Suddenly round the corner came a man. He was tall and swarthy, and looked after no good; Bruin growled savagely. Marjorie started and looked up; he was looking at her intently, but did not speak; in a glance Marjorie's eye took in the fact of his being a sailor, though it was years since she had seen one, and she knew also how many wild sailors, discharged, were roaming about. She glanced back and saw Caleb. His back was turned—he was talking to Katie—but a word would bring him, so she felt no fear; besides, to her all sailors were welcome, for the sake of her father and brother. The man's intense, searching gaze disturbed her though, and as he did not speak, she threw away her flower, and, retaining a hold of Bruin's collar, for he was growling savagely, she said gently, "Do you want anything?—have you lost your way?" The haggard face of the man, wan and shrunk from recent illness, his deep-sunken glowing eyes, and an inarticulate murmur were her only answer. She then remarked that his left arm was in a sling. "You are ill," she said, kindly. "Do you want to rest? If so, sit down on this bench—quiet, Bruin!—and I will bring you out something to eat and drink," and she turned and went quickly toward the house. He sat down, like a man in the extreme of exhaustion.

"I am not ill," he said, in a hollow voice that struck her mournfully. "I have lost my way—is this?"—He stopped.

She came back quickly, for he turned so deadly pale she thought he was going to faint. He looked up at her in an awful, searching way:

"Is this Yool Farm?"

"Yes," she said, catching only the end of the sentence. "But do rest. I will get you refreshment. My husband will be home soon; he will be able to tell you all about the direction you wish to go." He looked so wild she was almost frightened.

"You are very good," he said, in a tone quite gentle again.

She smiled and said, "I always feel for sailors. You are one, are you not?" He nodded. "Because my father was one; and I had a cousin, who"—Her voice faltered—even now she could hardly bear to talk of it.

"Had!" he muttered; then abruptly said,

"Dead?"

"Yes; long ago," she answered, and went quickly into the house. She found that Katie and Caleb were out in the yard,

and as she saw them sitting by the old saw-pit quite amicably, she would not disturb them, but cutting some bread and meat, and drawing a jug of beer, she was on the point of taking them out to the man (for she seemed to have lost her fear of him), when she suddenly recollected some faded lace on his collar and cuffs. The man must be an officer! It flashed on her quickly, and with delicacy of feeling she thought he would hardly care to eat his meals out there. She placed the things on the octagon table, and went out again. He was sitting still, with his head sunk on his wounded arm, and looking so ill and worn that her gentle heart ached for him.

"Will you come in?" she said. "It is getting damp and late to sit on this cold stone seat." He rose without a word, and opened the wicket gate for her. "Yes, he must be a gentleman," she thought.

They went into the octagon room—she called in Bruin, and sitting in her great arm-chair, kept the dog close to her. The sailor sat down, and she studiously avoided looking at him; for some few minutes there was silence. She only heard the wood-doves cooing from the fir-trees, soft and low; the splash in the water, caused by some frolicsome frog; the hum of some late insect; the hustle now and then of a bat's wing against the window-pane, and Caleb's voice talking to Katie; it was utterly peaceful. The vesper-light was dying out softly; the mist was rolling up thick and heavy now, and Marjorie watched the distant ridge for her husband's figure looming through the fog.

CHAPTER II.

"DEAD?" "YES, A LONG TIME AGO."

A DEEP sigh startled her. She looked up and saw the sailor, who had not touched his food, sitting in the fire-place, with his face buried in his hands.

"You have eaten nothing," she said, anxious to rouse him, and not knowing what to do or say.

"Thank you," he muttered. "You are very good, but I must go;" and he staggered up rather than rose.

She saw great drops on his brow, and he lifted his one free hand and pushed them off.

"Indeed, you must eat something," urged Marjorie, sitting still. "You look so weary and ill—do try."

He still stood clinching his hand, now very tightly.

"I cannot," he said. "I could not; it would kill me;" and he shuddered so violently that the table rattled against which he was leaning; but the tone was only utterly mournful and lost and despairing—not fierce. Marjorie's eyes swelled with pitying tears.

"Ah! sit down and rest," she said; "I cannot bear to think you should go away unrefreshed."

"I have very far to go," he muttered; "I am tired and must push on to-night."

"Wait and rest till my husband comes home," said Marjorie, urged by some strong feeling to insist on his remaining, "unless," she added, smiling, "anyone is waiting for you." Something like a fiercely strangled sob choked him, but he only answered:

"No one cares whether I go on or not. At least, I had better go." Marjorie did not like to say any more, though she began to be puzzled by his manner. He stood for a second in silence, then said: "You once had a cousin"—and stopped short.

"Yes," she answered, beginning to think he was wandering.

"Dead?" He brought it out with a cry nearly

"Yes, long ago."

"Did you love him?"

"Yes," she answered, compelled to answer by the fascination of his wild, glittering eyes; "I was to have married him."

"Do you love him?"

Marjorie rose startled, with her heart beating in thick, wild pants.

"Sir!"

"Marjorie!" The man was kneeling at her feet, with her dress pressed to his face, sobbing convulsively, despairingly. "Marjorie!"

O God! did ever a human name come from human lips in such an intense, heart-broken gasp? Far, far away—dim as the shadow it was of a lost memory and hope—Marjorie heard her name come thrilling to her heart. Then it had been so sweet, so low, so tender, so loving; it had nestled up against her heart, and struck the gold chord of her life, and flooded her whole being with such intense, heavenly love and happiness that she had well-nigh swooned. Now it came, hoarse and broken, from the depths of a strong man's agony—flooded with such bitter tears as only man can weep; sharp with despair and madness, fraught with such soul-absorbing, soul-subverting consequences that her spirit quailed and sank before it. The sweet olden echo, which she had kept as something utterly sacred and holy in the depth of her heart of hearts, was gone forevermore; and now the reality, the substance as it were, stood shrilling at her heart's door and crushing all before it.

She bent down, and pushing the hair back from the damp and matted brow of the man, she gazed wildly at him, then with a sudden wrench freed herself. She was white as death and cold as ice; her every nerve quivered with intense feeling. She tried to speak, but sound would not come between her dry, white lips. Even Edward was startled out of his agony.

"Marjorie, Marjorie, do you love me still? Do you love me still?" and then he broke down in wild sobs again, and clutched at her dress.

She shuddered together, and her eyes glazed almost.

"Edward! the door!—you must go!" she said, in a hoarse, dry voice.

"Marjorie, Marjorie," he sobbed, "don't send me away; I am utterly lonely. I have fought, and lived, and starved, and nearly died to see you again. For God's sake, mercy!"—he stretched his wan hands toward her—"mercy, mercy—as the souls of the damned will crave for mercy at the last day from God's dear Son—mercy, mercy!" Marjorie made no answer; she stood quite silent and motionless; had she moved she must have fallen. Her eyes were fixed alternately on the kneeling, heart-broken man, and then on the door through which her husband must come. She caught her breath in sharp, short throbs, which nearly choked her with agony, but she could not still them. Seeing her so silent, he crawled a little nearer. "Marjorie, do you love me still?" (She recoiled.) "Oh, Marjorie, say you do. Say you do love me—the only living thing in this great, desolate, weary world. Oh, Marjorie! if you only knew what I have borne, what I have suffered, how I have struggled to live to see you again—and then—Oh, Marjorie, my heart is breaking!" again he sobbed convulsively.

"Edward, you must go. Go!"

"Marjorie! mercy! why must I go? Is it that you love me!—me, me? Do you love me?" His face flamed up, then turned as before, ashen hue, at her look. "God forgive me," he murmured. "You so good, so pure." He paused, and was silent for a second or two, with his face buried in his trembling hands, and his whole body vibrating with intense controlled emotion; then he looked up. "Marjorie, I will go, but—but—kiss me once, Marjorie—only once, after all these long, long years."

"You must go," she said. "Go!"

Footsteps came along the passage, but they neither of them heard.

"Marjorie, mercy! only once. Mercy, mercy! Oh! I cannot go so."

"Go!" was all she said.

He rose trembling and swept the great drops from his brow and cheek.

"Why should I go?—what harm have I done, Marjorie?" He advanced in his despair, and then she broke down, and hiding her face in her hands, she said:

"Edward, Edward, have pity! have mercy!"

He looked stunned; he stopped short for one instant, a perfect tempest of feeling raged in his heart, and then he said:

"I will go, Marjorie"—he was very gentle now—"for I love you still, and—you are married." He bent forward, kissed the white shrouding hands, and turned to the door. As he passed out he stumbled, and, striking his forehead on the lintel, fell heavily to the ground.

Reuben's voice said quietly at the open door, "Don't be frightened, Marjorie; he is not hurt;" and then, with one quick, upward glance at her husband's grave, calm face, a vain effort to articulate two words, Marjorie went past him and fled to her own room, bolting her door, and falling on her knees.

CHAPTER III.

FEVER-STRUCK.

"CALEB! Caleb!"

Caleb came running in, stopped short, and exclaimed loudly on seeing the man lying full length on the ground.

"Hold your tongue!" said Reuben, harshly; then added more gently, "Don't alarm your mistress, she is far from strong."

Between them, they lifted the heavy dead weight and bore it up-stairs to Caleb's room, it being the only one ready to receive him.

"Oh, Lord! master, he is dead," said Caleb, in an awe-struck voice, as the man's head fell heavily to one side.

"No, he is not," said Reuben, with a sigh so heavy that Caleb said, involuntarily:

"Do you know him, master?"

"Yes; he is my wife's cousin; we thought he had been drowned years ago."

"Oh, Lord!" ejaculated Caleb, as before.

They loosened his heavy seamen's jacket and jersey, giving him air, and Reuben laid his hand on his heart, it beat faintly. He raised him, and so doing his hand became entangled in a chain and pulled it out; it was a chain of fair hair, to which was attached a cross of iron, partially severed, evidently by some keen instrument. He gave a quiet glance at the chain, and his face paled visibly, and then he replaced it very gently. After a few minutes the man moaned feebly and turned slightly toward him, and after a gasp or two, opened his eyes and gazed wildly at him, then muttered:

"Dead—a long time ago!"

"He is raving," said Reuben, very quietly. "I will fetch Kate. It seems to me like fever; but she will know."

Katie was busy in the kitchen when he went in; he closed the door carefully and then said:

"Katie, something very strange has happened."

"Oh, Lord!" said Katie, turning pale. "Has the Dame come back?"

"No, but somebody else has come back, Katie." Katie backed away from him, looking scared.

"Somebody you used to know very well indeed. Edward Fleming."

Down sat Katie in the middle of the floor, but still in silence; presently she said:

"Oh, Lord! does Miss Marjorie know?" very slowly.

"Yes, my wife has seen him."

"Oh, Lord!" Again a pause, used by Katie to wipe her forehead with a very dirty apron. "Well, master!"

"Well, Katie, he is very ill, of fever I think; can you undertake to nurse him, without any noise and fuss?"

"Yes, Oh, Lord!"

"Come then." He went up stairs.

Once or twice she ejaculated "Oh, Lord!" on the way up, but when they got to the room and she saw the man she had known so well as a boy, and whom she had supposed dead, years ago, she gave one great bursting sob, and then, twisting up her apron into a wisp, just shoved Caleb away, and sitting down on the bed, and taking the sailor's head in her lap, said, "It's reg'lar bad typhus, and no mistake—worst low though. Now, master, you'll just keep Miss Marjorie away and tell her nothing about it, and she'll never be the worse for it; and you just go away, and you, Caleb, and leave me to settle him, and he'll do."

They obeyed her, and after "settling" the sick man in his bed and opening the window wide, and having a few good bursting sobs, she came back and looked at him. His eyes were wide open, and he looked at her quite quietly.

"Don't you tell Marjorie I am dead," he said deliberately. "Because they've not made my grave yet, and she must not see me till they have."

"No, my dear; there, lie still. They can't bury you till they have a grave, you know—eh?"

"No," he said; then, "I know you. You are the sea-serpent."

"Yes, I am, but I won't eat you if you lie still," she said gravely; "lie still."

It was not till late at night that Reuben, having left Caleb concocting some herbal tea for Katie, gave a low knock at Marjorie's door. He heard her come slowly across the room and undo it, and as she shrunk away from him as he entered, he put his arm round her and kissed her forehead tenderly; then he led her to a couch at the foot of the bed, and drawing her down by his side, kept his arm round her, pressed her head on his shoulder, and holding her stone cold hands in one of his, said:

"My wife, you are very tired."

She made no answer.

"Come, rest where you are, and I will tell you all about it. We have taken Edward"—he felt her hands leap in his—"to Caleb's room; he is ill of fever, but Katie is nursing him, and we hope he will soon get well, and then will you not be glad he has come home, Marjorie, my darling?" He said it very gently and tenderly, and a convulsive sob shook her, but she did not speak. The moon was up to her full. The window was wide open, and the fog-vapors were pouring in thick and wan, and wreathing up in spirals; he noticed this quickly, and, getting up, closed the window. "Now, will you rest?" he said, sitting down by her again. "Will you go to bed, Marjorie? You are cold and shivering; my darling, you will be ill."

And he shuddered, thinking of the fever in the house; but she clung to him dumbly, and he could not bear to put her from him, so he dragged a heavy cloak off the bed and wrapped it round her. They sat in silence for a little time. Now and then she shuddered all over, and then he would bend down and gaze anxiously in her white face. Once or twice she moved, and he did the same, but she never spoke; her large dark eyes were wide open, dry, hot, and tearless, and he longed to see her weep; he spoke to her several times—of Edward, of her father; he tried to break that stony silence, but she could not speak. The shock had been so great and awful to her, the shock and dread of Reuben and of herself and for Edward. An hour passed; her head fell lower now against his breast, and he hoped, seeing her eyelids close, that she slept; just then a low, gruff voice said outside, "Master;" and then by the quick thrilling shudder he knew she was still awake.

"Yes," he answered; "come in."

The door opened a crack in width, and Caleb stood there with a flaring rushlight.

"Please, master,"—Then he hesitated.

"I will come," ended Reuben quickly. Caleb closed the door. "Marjorie, my darling, I must go—lie down, at least, to please me." She gave no answer, but made no resistance when he lifted her gently, and, carrying her to the bed, laid her on it, and drew the heavy counterpane over her. "Try and sleep," he said wistfully; "I will come back soon." He sighed heavily on receiving no answer, and then went. "God comfort her," he murmured, and wrung his hands together.

Caleb stood outside, pale and staring.

"Oh, master! he's so awful bad, we think he'll die."

"Nonsense! nonsense!" said Reuben quickly; but hearing Katie calling, he went quickly down the passage.

Marjorie, weak in body, had received a terrible shock by this sudden return of her cousin; in fact she was partially paralyzed and stunned mentally by it, and in the weak state she was in one fearful thought stood out before her. Did she love him still? A thought so terrible that she was for the time being stunned from her power to think and reason, and she tried vainly to analyze her feelings. She was too confused to be able to decide this, and it was some weeks before she realized how truly and thoroughly she had outgrown her first love, in reverence, trust, and (last and greatest of all) love for her husband. Marjorie was so purely "single-hearted" in all her thoughts and feelings, so essentially true in the highest and best sense of the word, that the very doubt of herself brought up before her vivid and overstrained imagination a host of self-accusations, none the less terrible that they held not one of them the very shadow of truth; and so she was silent and stunned and terrified before her husband, and as yet even the worst had not come; for she was still, as I before said, partially paralyzed by surprise. And Reuben pitied her, felt for her, dreaded for her, and only loved her and trusted her tenfold more than he thought he had ever done before.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND MEETING.

THE fever continued for some weeks unabated, though it was less typhus than low nervous, brought on by weakness of body, pain of the recently healed arm, and great agony of mind. The unhappy sailor would toss raving about his bed, talking fast and vehemently of wreck and storm, and perils on land and many waters, or wail, "Marjorie! Marjorie! Marjorie!" till Katie would sob for very sympathy; or else he would lie quiet as a weary child, with his hands tightly locked, and his great, blazing, fever-lit eyes wide open, and talk fast and low of his happy, merry youth and adventures; and through all—woven in and out, like one precious thread in a fabric of homely stuff—was the thought, the name, the love for and of Marjorie.

Reuben suffered greatly during this time—quite as much as Edward, though "with a difference." He would come in weary from his farm-work, and sit in the evenings, growing long and light, and listen to those incoherent wanderings; he would think of his unhappy fate in having, as he thought, blighted those two young lives. If he had only been content to let his dream vanish unrealized, now Marjorie would be free. Why had he made her marry him? She had never loved him.

When she was sick to death with sorrow, he had won her; and this was his reward! He remembered her love, her deep, passionate love for this only cousin, which had, so to speak, been part of her existence from her very entrance into the world; he remembered how she had nearly died on hearing of his death, how she had changed into a grave and sad woman while still merely a child in years; he remembered how she had married him (Reuben) confessing that she still loved the man she supposed dead; he knew that doing her best—as she had done—she had been married to him full two years without loving him; and now—now, just as she was beginning to care for him—to love him (he felt it in her altered touch and in her softened eye), now the man whom she had loved had come back from the very depths of the grave to claim her love again.

Looking at him lying there, feeble, worn out, a wreck, would it not be better if he died where he lay?

Poor fellow! Reuben, with his own heart aching so bitterly, could also sorrow for him; he had "borne the heat and burden of the day;" he had doubtless fought, striven, lived—all but died—to see her again; and then, when at last he came home, it was to find his betrothed wife married to another.

"Oh, my God! why are such things allowed?" groaned Reuben to himself with bitterness in his heart, thinking sadly that if only he had left Marjorie to fight her own way, lonely, unloved—with only Katie to care for her—she might now have married Edward, and all would have been well; and yet he had acted from the deepest impulses of a noble and generous nature, and had striven to act for the best.

All this time Marjorie had never once asked to see Edward; she dared not. Reuben brought her a daily report, which he softened as much as he could; and she only asked one or two questions, and would then allow the subject to drop. She never so much as saw Katie, even at a distance; and she herself could get but little in the way of any one, for the shock had not yet been overcome; the least noise, or extra talking, brought on fits of nervous ague terrible to behold.

Coming in one evening with a somewhat better account, Reuben perceived that she had taken down and put away the feather fans, the shells, the cushion—everything, in short, that Edward had given her. He made no remark, but his heart sank more

heavily than before. Could she, then, no longer bear to have the silent pleading of their presence even? As he grew more unhappy, more anxious, more wretched, so he returned to his former gravity of manner and taciturnity. He had gradually been growing quite cheerful and almost talkative; now, when he came in of an evening, he would sit down after a few words of greeting, and, burying himself in a book, never speak for the rest of the time.

Once or twice, if he thought he dared, he would look up and gaze at his wife with such an intense expression of love and sorrow that once, when she met it, it thrilled her with terror unspeakable.

Did he too think she loved her cousin still? All the horror and fear of herself returned in full force; and she got up and left the room, shaking in every limb.

He noticed it, but misconstrued the action; and burying his head in his arms at the time, never looked her in the face again, though he would watch her from a distance. He was foolish, weak, unmanly, doubtless; but he was not infallible, and if he erred, it was from excess of love and pity. He had said once he would trust his wife as he would God's mercy; so he did and would; but he doubted her strength of body, and feared the struggle would wear her out.

One delicious evening, soft and balmy, Reuben was sitting in the octagon room, and Marjorie was strolling in the garden, when Katie came in.

"Master," she said, "the captain wants to see you and Miss Marjorie." (Katie had dubbed Edward "captain," during his illness, no one knew why—probably as a term of endearment.) Reuben got up quickly—he had always known this must come—why should not Edward see his cousin?

"How is he to-night?" he asked.

Katie began sobbing. "Very gentle and quiet, master; I think he is dying."

Reuben started; the sailor had been so much better the last few days they had actually talked of his getting up.

"Very well, Katie, we will come." He went out and called Marjorie. Marjorie had her hands full of Lent-lilies and a little piece of apple-blossom. Her face was radiant and flushed with fatigue and Reuben dreaded taking her out of this soft evening air into the heat of a sick-room. But Katie's anxious face was at Edward's window beckoning; it must be done. "Marjorie, he wants to see us—will you go?" Marjorie's face paled, but she made no answer, only laying her hand in his, and just as she was, with the Lent-lilies and apple-blossom tightly clasped, he led her up-stairs. Katie had the door wide open for them, and was crying quietly. Marjorie had regained her faith in herself, now the time was come; she drew her hand from her husband's and leaving him on the threshold, she went quickly forward, and, kneeling by the low bed, she gently kissed the hot, wide brow, as white and soft as her own. What no power on earth would have made her do, doubting her own singleness of heart, she did as innocently and fearlessly, undoubting, as Una touched the lion, secure in herself.

The sailor, who had roused eagerly, weak, dying as he looked, when she came in, and who, forgetting all but that she had been his affianced wife and he had been dying, gave one thrilling, speechless look of anxiety and love in her tearless eyes; and then, instead of twining his stretched arms round her beautiful bending head and drawing it down to rest on the pillow by his side, he turned away with a sigh so deep and bitter that Marjorie trembled where she knelt. Ay! she had made him feel that he had lost her.

"Edward," she said, fearfully, on seeing the blood flushing and paling in rapid succession on his wasted features—"Edward, speak to me!"

Two great bitter, burning tears burst from his closed lids and rolled down his cheeks.

"Marjorie! oh, Marjorie! I have loved you all these years."

Alas! unhappy Marjorie, burying her face in her hands from sight of his misery, she might have said the same. When she looked up again, they were alone and the door was closed; she got up wildly to go, but one glance at the pale, dying face before her stopped her.

"Edward," she said, growing cold as ice and speaking slowly, "do not despair."

"I—I could not have been dead," and he laughed hollowly, "more than five months." Yes, it was true, he had the right to upbraid her—she knew it; she knelt down again and drew one of his thin, wasted hands in hers.

"Listen," she said slowly, "I will tell you all." And she did, word for word—all she had suffered, her father's illness, his death, the terrible scene between her and her father, in which he had implored her to marry Reuben Yool, and how she had at last consented. "What did it matter to me?" she said quietly; "you were dead; what was there, who was there to please or live for, except him, my father? I consented on condition he knew I did not love him, still loved you; and he took me, so knowing. Oh, Edward! he was very loving, very noble, very generous; he bore with me, he never asked me for word or look of love, for all these long years; and he has borne what few men would bear." She was still quiet and tearless.

"Aye, he has been good and generous," said Edward; "but he has had the one thing he cared to have, and I—O God! why did I struggle to live in that wild, raging gale? Why did I endure thirst, hunger, pain, imprisonment, torture of mind and body? Give up my prize, give up my rank, my fortune, my everything, for a love that is turned to ashes in my heart? Why did I not let myself drown on that night off the rocks, instead of coming home weary, wounded, ruined, to find that a woman's love

is but a dead leaf on a blasted tree, and falls at the feet of the first who calls? O God! I would I were dead!" and turning away his head, he sobbed convulsively. She was silent. He was unjust—bitterly, cruelly unjust—but she would not heed. Presently he spoke again: "Oh, Marjorie! the thought of your pure, strong love for me, your sweet, gentle face, your loving prayers were ever round me. I faced all dangers cheerfully, I bore hardships, wounds, and agony—I braved death in many shapes—to win honor for your sake, to be more worthy of winning you, and now you do not even love me! All these years I have been toiling for you, and you have been drinking from another man's cup, and giving me not even one thought. What a waste of my life!" he went on, wildly. "Oh, Marjorie! Marjorie! what a waste of my life! Oh, Marjorie, after all these years, cannot you love me a little, a very little—cannot you spare me *half*?" He raised himself fevered; he clutched her soft white hands. He gazed at her with the bitter, aching tears of his desolation rushing down his thin cheeks, while the choking sobs of exhaustion brought the beading drops on his brow; and then his voice faltered into a low, pleading tone of anguish, as she turned from him so utterly sadly: "Oh, Marjorie! by our common orphanhood, by our misery, our lost lives, our common knowledge of the desolation of this weary, tear-stained world, love me still a little!"

Yet she only turned from him unheeding as it were, and said, low and determined:

"Edward, you know not what you ask. I owe all—all—all my love to my husband."

"So very little would content me," he said hoarsely; "he would never miss it—say only you have and do love me!"

He sank back quite exhausted, and turned so gray she feared he was dying; but she would not call for help. She dipped her handkerchief in vinegar, and laid it on his temples; she poured some wine between his white and fluttering lips, and then, as he swooned quite away, she burst into passionate tears, and kissed his brow and lips many times.

"It would be best if you did die," she said several times. "Poor boy—poor Edward!"

Her husband's voice in the corridor roused her, and he and Katie came in at her call. They raised the sailor, and at length he came round again slowly and by painful degrees; but when he looked wildly around, Marjorie was gone, so he lay back with a bitter sigh and pretended to sleep. Reuben never asked Marjorie anything about this scene, and she never alluded to it in any way; but she had gone to her room, and there, kneeling and alone, she had wept such bitter, agonized tears as she had not shed since the day they had told her of Edward's supposed death.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE APPLE-TREES.

THE next fortnight was wet and drizzly. The wind sobbed against Edward's window mournfully and sadly, and the sick man lay more weary and weak than ever. Marjorie he could see now and then crossing the court, or faintly heard her moving in the corridors, and he decided that as soon as he could stand he would go away; he could not bear the proximity. Plash, plash went the rain all day long; and to hear the wet dripping in a hollow courtyard, and never ceasing, is terribly depressing. Now and then he would catch a sharp whistle from Caleb, or the call of the shepherds gathering their flocks, but all else was silence, except for the wet ivy so drenched that it had no power save to flap drearily against the window panes. Katie, now that he was better, left him a good deal to himself, and he lay the long hours through, twisting his sheets up and down, and breaking his heart over his lost past, and gnawing his lips for very listlessness. The mist and fog vapors seemed to grow thicker and heavier every day—would the sun never come out again? He had counted the panels all around his room till he was sick and tired. The very number of cracks in each panel, the very number of ivy-leaves on each spray—he knew them all. At last one morning the fogs rose, the sun came out—hot, hot; the earth steamed under the deep sullen glare; a fragrant incense of budding leaves and blossoms went up; the bird-shadows flitted past his window; the dusty motes danced merrily in the gleaming light; the dark, somber fir and yew trees looked verdant with fresh emerald points; the thorns were in full leaf, the apple trees in full blossom; as though by magic, all things awoke—and Edward got up; he crept down-stairs like a specter, and crawled out into the garden. Marjorie in her black hood stood with her back to him; he crept up to a stone seat, hot with the sun, and sat down, trembling all over. Two heavy-laden gold-brown bees swung past him with a boom; Bruin came up to him and licked his hands; a sulphur butterfly came and sat on his hand. The heavy odor of fruit trees hung over him. The hot sun streamed on his bare head through the thickening boughs of the apple-tree, and a soft air lifted the light curling hair and lighted on his damp brow—he was out and free, and he drew deep breaths of the sweet honey-like atmosphere.

"Edward!" Marjorie was by him with her quick, light step, and had folded her old gray cloak round him in one second of time, had turned over an ancient basket for his feet to rest on and had fetched a straw hat for his head; he was so weak and overcome that he could not thank her, and without any more words she was back at her gardening, sowing seeds, and weeding, and singing softly to herself. At first his whole heart overflowed with tenderness and love toward her. Then, as he heard her low singing, he thought bitterly:

"She does not mind how weak and ill I am; she

can go on singing just the same as ever." So he closed his eyes and would not answer her when she brought him a few violets and laid them on his hand, asking him how he felt. She stood quite silent then, looking at him, while her eyes filled with tears as she marked how wasted and thin he was.

"Edward," she said, at last, "would you like any thing else round you—are you warm enough?"

He would not answer; so at length she went away again, and then he opened his eyes and watched her as before. Presently Katie came out and gave a great start on seeing him, such an odd figure as he was too; then she came up quite crossly.

"What business have you out, a day like this? You'll be ill again, and serve you right."

He gave her a fierce look, and was on the point of venting his wrath upon her, when Marjorie came to the rescue.

"Now, Katie, go away," she said; "he is my patient now he is down; you have had quite enough of him, and he of you."

Katie growled and made off in silence, and Marjorie, going in, fetched out the "Fairy Queen," and read to him. She thought he was dozing, for he had closed his eyes and never spoke, when suddenly he said:

"Would you care if I died?"

He said it fiercely and abruptly, and Marjorie laid down the book thoughtfully.

"Edward," she answered, "you know I would."

He twisted round toward her miserably.

"I am going away when I am well enough, so you need not fear my teasing you long."

She took one of his hands and held it, and felt how his pulse was leaping and throbbing, and how hot and burning it was.

"Dear Edward," she said very gently, "you will not go till you are quite cured; we should not like to lose you again so soon."

And she looked so earnestly and wistfully in his face that he could not choose but believe her; yet he was wroth, and so he said scornfully:

"We? You might have said I, I think—what does he care?"

"He does care," said Marjorie, gravely, and dropping the nerveless hand, "and you know he does, Edward."

But he only groaned and turned away again.

Then she took up the book and went on reading. Just then a wicked little wind, full of wantonness and mischief, caught the leaves and tossed them about, and the sprays of bilberries, which Marjorie had forgotten she had put in this book since Edward's return, fell fluttering to their feet.

He gave a cry, and their eyes met; and she stooped to pick it up, but he snatched it from her, and, breaking it into a thousand fragments, flung them away.

"Oh, Edward!" she said, sadly, "I have kept that all these years."

"Well, then, so much the better to get rid of rubbish now," he said, with a savage laugh. "I wonder where is the other cursed thing I gave you."

Just then Reuben came into the garden, and seeing them, came slowly toward them; and Edward dropped her hands like burning coals, and Marjorie turned scarlet.

Why was she so foolish?

She looked timidly toward her husband, but unless you took into account a slight contraction of the brow, he was apparently quite unaware of what had passed.

"I am very glad to see you out, Fleming," he said kindly. "You will soon get about again now."

"Aye," was his only answer, and the sailor leaned back wearily.

Marjorie rose to go, and had left them a few paces when she was startled by a loud, passionate exclamation:

"Give it to me, directly!"

She looked back, frightened.

Edward was standing up, white and scarlet by turns; he had wrested something—she could not see what—from Reuben, who looked utterly confounded.

Marjorie sprang back.

"Edward," she said, warningly, "you will be ill again."

"What does it matter?" he said, furiously; and, turning on his heel, went into the house.

Reuben looked gravely at her.

"He is quite delirious," he said. "Flew into a passion because I picked up a scrap of twig."

"Had it red leaves?" asked his wife.

"Well, I did not look."

"Oh!"—

CHAPTER VI.

NEVERMORE.

DAY after day Edward grew stronger. Indeed, he was stronger than he thought, but he kept himself back; he longed to go, and yet could not tear himself away, for he felt that once gone, he dared never return.

One morning, two weeks after his first descent, he came into the octagon chamber. Marjorie looked up surprised. Of late he had kept away from her, and rarely ever spoke to her. He was fully dressed, and had a bundle on his arm. He sat down by the empty fire-place, and Marjorie, having said good-morning, went on with what she was doing. Reuben had gone away for the whole day. Katie and Caleb were down in the "dungeon." Everything was quiet and calm. Marjorie sighed involuntarily, she could not help feeling how altered Edward was; how savage and bitter he had grown; poor fellow, none knew it better than he did himself. He wrestled vainly against his wild moodiness; he went out alone, wandered up and down the old house, sat for hours on the edge of the saw-pit, pitching stones across

it into the bank of dock-leaves, and tried to fight out his love and his misery; it was of no good, he knew he must go and so he had come down that morning, bundle in hand, and sat watching Marjorie for the last time for many years to come. He softened again into the tender-hearted sailor he had been when he first won her. Marjorie was thinking of Reuben—how grave and taciturn and pale he had grown of late; how that he never spoke to her now unless obliged, but how sometimes he sighed so heavily when he was sitting with her in the evenings, and how, now and then, when she looked up furtively, she saw how utterly sad his face was, as one watching a dying hope, or musing over a lost dream. She noted, too, with quick leaping throbs, how he would go away when Edward came in, and how he never, by word or look, addressed her in her cousin's presence. She knew how great the strain was on him, and she grew more and more timid and shy with him, as it dawned on her that she indeed loved him at last, and that he was dreading lest in any way he should prove a hindrance or tie on her. She felt that she colored violently, and put on a constrained and forced manner if ever he came in unexpectedly and found her with Edward. What could he but think? For Edward himself her heart smote her whenever she looked at him, and yet, what could she do? These two were thus silent, and save for the cawing of a few early rooks, there was silence all round them; presently the door was pushed open and poor lame Bruin limped in. The dog had grown fond of Edward, and would always come at his call, and now he sat looking up at the sailor with his great wistful eyes.

"What a good faithful beast," said Edward aloud. "That he is," said Marjorie, turning round, and then, seeing his bundle, a thought struck her like a blow—was he going away so soon, and hardly well yet? He saw her look of anxiety, but said nothing about his purpose, only stroking back the dog's ears gently and watching Marjorie with a furtive anxiety. She had to go to the cabinet for some yarn, and as she opened the door of it, out fell one of the feather fans, so close to Bruin that, as it fluttered to his feet, he put down his head and snuffed at it. Edward remembered, in a flash as it were, the last time he had seen them, when he had piled them at her door, the night he had won her. He lifted it curiously and looked at the little bird's head in the center; Marjorie stood waiting and trembling; presently he looked up and said:

"Why don't you use them, Marjorie? you used to do so always."

Marjorie was silent. "Was it because—" But he did not finish his sentence, but getting up, came to the cabinet, took out the other, and the shells and the cushion and the stuffed parrot, and arranged them all on the mantel-piece; then coming back after placing the cushion in the big chair, he said:

"You need not put them away again, Marjorie; I am going away where I shall never see them. Let them wear out, they make the room look nice."

Marjorie had stood quite quiet, allowing him to arrange the things as he liked, and only wondering what he was going to do next; as she still did not answer, he grew desperate, went back, gave an extra twist to the fans, and then, lifting his bundle from the floor, said carelessly:

"Well, good-by! I suppose I shall see you again some day," and swung off toward the door.

Marjorie heard the latch actually click. Bruin stood between them, looking bewildered, and she grew sick with a strange longing and yearning to call him back and comfort his sore heart.

"Edward—come back, Edward!"

"Ay, ay, I'll come back!" he stammered; "some day, maybe, I will meet you up above. You don't want me here,"—and yet he paused irresolute in the doorway—"I'm too rough for you, Marjorie," (coming back unwittingly to the old pet name), "so I'll just off to sea again, and you'll never miss me—" his voice choked. "Good-by, and God bless you!"

"Oh, Edward, stop!" "It's no good stopping—I've naught more to say to you, nor you to me. Don't weep now, Marjorie—my doo—my gentle Marjorie, God bless you! let me go so. I could not bear to say more, but sometimes in the stormy nights think of me and pray for me; I believe your prayers kept me safe before—though what's the good of living now, Marjorie?"

Marjorie, with the tears running down her cheeks, stretched her hands toward him.

"Oh, Edward! don't go so—don't go so, or else I shall believe you cannot forgive me, and—and—" She stopped.

All the old, gentle feeling, and the old, absorbing, passionate love for her surged up in the sailor's aching heart; he put down his bundle and came back, and taking both her hands, he said:

"Marjorie, I forgive you, truly and really—perhaps you could not help it." How it wrung his heart to say so, but at that moment he would have said anything to comfort her. "The only good there may be in me I owe to you and my love for you; you have shown me how good and gentle and high a woman may be, and I shall always carry in my heart the thought of you, my best darling." He stopped, and then went on again more quickly. "It is because I feel you are too good for me, and that I cannot help loving you, and so paining and teasing you that I am going, and going so. I dare not say much, Marjorie; but you know as well as I do how rough and bearish I have been lately; forgive me—my heart ached so. Now I have only my profession, and I will make a good sailor and fight my way up, and—and—"

He stopped again with tears glittering in his eyes. "Well, never mind, only sometimes if there is a

great storm, or if you chance to think of old days, give me a kindly thought, Marjorie. I must go—good-by, my darling!—God bless you, forever!" He wrung her hands tightly, bent down and kissed her, and then silently lifting his bundle, made for the door. "Thank Reuben—I shall not see him; but—but—oh, Marjorie!" She had crouched down, and her face was buried in the great chair; he came back more slowly than before.

"Marjorie!" he said, hoarsely, "I cannot bear to leave you so; do look up once, and say good-by to me; I may never see you again; give me a god-speed and a smile." But she only crouched lower and lower; he dashed his hand over his face, then forcing a smile, said:

"Marjorie, it's only Cousin Ned going a cruise, like he used to do, long ago; look up, my bonnie—come." He stooped over her tenderly and laid his hand on her hair, but Marjorie was thinking of long ago; of this same "Ned" who had been all and everything to her—brother, cousin, lover—and whose heart she had tortured and broken; she knew well enough the forced voice, and she felt in every limb the trembling of his hand; she felt also that she could hardly bear to let him go, when he might never, never, never come back again; and yet it was better so, and this she said to herself over and over again.

"Well, I must go, though it's hard," he said after a pause. "Good-by, again: I am off."

He looked at her anxiously, wistfully, with a yearning and love in his eyes indescribable, and then, restraining himself, with a low murmur, "It's cruel to leave her," he turned away for the last time, gave one last look at the crouched-up figure, and with a choking sob went out.

The door clanged heavily to—Bruin whined—and then he was gone; the struggle, the bitter blasting of his life was finished.

CHAPTER—LAST.

"BECAUSE—BECAUSE I LOVE YOU."

"MARJORIE! what ails you?" Reuben lifted her from her position; she turned and clung to him, her last, her all now; would she have had it otherwise?—who knows?

"Are you ill?" he said, anxiously. "No," she whispered and then said, "Edward is gone."

"Oh!" His face changed; he stroked her hair very gently. "Poor child," he said, with a heavy sigh. "Why did he go so soon? he might have stayed till he was well."

She made no answer, and after a quick look at her, he left her alone and went out again.

Marjorie went about as usual with her busy plying fingers and quick feet, but she had lost something, and her heart was heavy often and often. Reuben too was altered, and she feared him; she would watch him in silence, but he rarely spoke to her, and grew more quiet than ever. Under the apple-tree she would sit and think of him and Edward—the difference between them, and how it was, and why they should have crossed each other's lives as they had done. If she could only have loved them equally, I believe she would have done so gladly, and yet enough love lingered for her cousin to make her very sad for him; she had cared and would always care for him; but it was different from her love for Reuben. She had loved Edward passionately, wildly; she loved Reuben quietly and intensely. She wondered at herself, and would sit dreamily wondering for long together; she almost feared that Reuben was tired of trying to win her, and was giving up in despair, and was learning simply to bear with her, and this thought was so terrible that she would pray to God that she might be able to comfort him in any way.

Thinking this, she grew more and more timid and confused with him, as though he could read her thoughts; and he watched her far more than she was aware of, and came to the bitter conclusion that now indeed all chance of her love was passed away. He tried to be like himself, to answer her quickly and with a smile, to speak as usual about indifferent things and purposes. He would take himself to task and say it was his own fault; why had he ever tried to make her love him—he, the yeoman, the man old enough and grave enough to be her father? He had only destroyed her life and her happiness, how could she do aught but hate him? How painful it must be to her; he had blighted her life; did he expect her to thank him for it?—oh, no! he knew it never, never could be; why did he think of it? only his Marjorie, his darling, his gentle, high-souled wife—if—if only she could have loved him, how utterly happy they might have been. He sat so one evening thinking of this in the twilight, with his arms folded on the table and his head bent down, with a gray, sad look upon his face that aged him ten years; he dared look so now, for Marjorie was out in the garden watering her plants after the heat of the day, and she could not come in without his seeing her, without his hearing her light footfall.

We all know, when we are utterly sad, what a mercy it is to feel now and then that we are quite alone, quite unobserved; that not even the eyes we love most are watching us ever so tenderly; that no matter how many lines fall round our eyes and mouth, how many bitter tears ache in our eyes, how often we sigh, no living thing sees us. I think it is part of our animal nature, this liking to get away and be quiet and sad, without witness. Reuben sat so.

Three weeks had passed since Edward had gone, and each day only added to his burden.

"It would not matter if one could die," he thought; "then she would be free again." Yet that very thought of leaving her was anguish untold. He sat quite quiet.

"If one could die!" involuntarily he said aloud, which startled him, and he looked out. It was quite dusk; great soft moths were flying about, the wind was chiming in the fir-trees, the bloom of the lilacs, and laburnums hung heavy on the air. The ripple of the burn went trickle, trickle over the stones and formed a refrain: "If I could die!" A few rooks floated home, cawing softly, a little soft cloud like a rose-leaf in the sky lay close to where the sun had gone down, and farther off in the haze was one long band of gold light, like a scepter lying athwart the sky—the golden rod of one of the angels.

"If I could die!"

There was a rustle, and Marjorie was at his elbow, kneeling and looking up at him wistfully. She was very pale, and her dark eyes were swimming in tears. He started violently.

"Well, Marjorie, my darling," he said, putting one arm round her, "are you tired?" He leaned his head sideways on one hand and looked at her kindly.

"Reuben," she said, with a great effort, and very sadly, "why do you wish to die?"

He started, for he was quite unaware he had said it aloud again.

"I? Marjorie, you are dreaming."

"No, I heard it distinctly." She was looking up at him solemnly in the gathering darkness; his mouth quivered, and he made no answer.

"Oh, Reuben! I cannot bear it," she said, passionately. "I cannot bear you to be so sad; if it is my fault, let me try and undo it."

A strange and awful look gleamed over his face for a second; he made a sort of vague motion to draw her toward him, then he said very low:

"Never mind, my Marjorie, you cannot help it; it is not your fault, it was mine."

She drew closer to him, and looked up in his grave, stern face, so awfully stern.

"Oh, Reuben!" she said very low, "I cannot bear it!" and she hid her face on his breast, trembling.

"I am afraid I try you very hard," he said, hoarsely. "I do not mean to be so stern and cold and hard—but, oh, Marjorie!"—he stopped short—"you have taken me unawares. Never mind, Marjorie: go back to your flowers, my wife; don't mind me."

She clung to him convulsively, though she was terrified at his tone, and she said again breathlessly:

"Reuben, I cannot bear it—what have I done?"

"Done? my gentle wife, nothing. You are as good and as true as the angels. Look up, Marjorie, I want to tell you something. Do you know what I said of you once—that I would trust you as I would God's mercy?—aye! and I do."

She trembled and shrank, then said again:

"It's all of no use, Reuben, if I cannot comfort you—I cannot bear it!" and she hid her face lower still. He smiled wanly.

"Why not? Marjorie, why not; what can't you bear?"

"That you wish to die."

"Well, and if I did!" he said hoarsely.

"Oh! Reuben, Reuben, I can't bear it!"

"Why?"

He drew her closer, very tenderly, till her face was close to his, and he felt the tears on his cheek; his gentleness seemed to give her courage; she said very low:

"Because—because I love you!"

"Oh! Marjorie, my wife!"

At last, at last, after long years Reuben Yool had won his wife.

Well and truly had he loved her and cared for her, and his happiness was almost more than he could bear.

One cannot write of those things—or that stern, grave man, who laid his head on his wife's shoulder and sobbed for joy, overcome and broken down at last; sobbed as he had not done since as a child he had cried over his mother's grave.

Often in after years they talked about the Dell Cottage and the sailor cousin; but, as Marjorie always wound up, "That was a long time ago!" Aye, true, yet these memories were very dear to Marjorie still, and often and often she longed for news or tidings of the sailor, yet they never came.

THE END.

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